

CULT  
MOVIES



NO. 14

# CULT MOVIES

BRITISH HORROR BAN  
of the 1930's"

by Frank Dello Stritto

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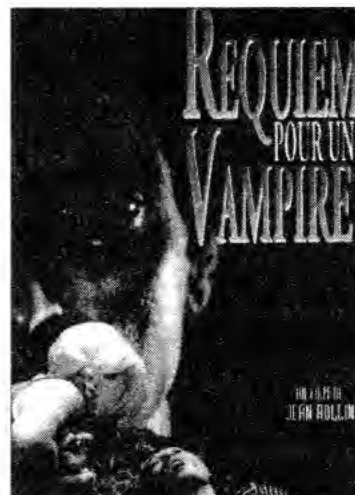
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# **CULT MOVIES**

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This issue dedicated to the genius of Fred Olen Ray.

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**CULT MOVIES**

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# DEEP INSIDE CULT MOVIES

by Michael Copner



Michael Copner

Every now and then we're asked by advertisers and magazine distributors just what our demographics are. And I have to confess, about as near an answer as I can summon up is, "The baby boom generation." I know we have more middle-agers than either senior citizens or teenagers, and more male readers than female. But from looking at the fan mail, I get the impression that our readership is scattered all over the demographic chart. I don't really know what the age of the average *Cult Movies* reader is. But I do know what they weigh.

Several issues back we offered a free *Cult Movies* T-shirt to any subscriber who went for a two-year sub instead of just one year. And quite a few of you went for the deal; several hundred of you in fact. And out of that number, exactly one person requested merely a large sized T-shirt. I'm sure you know who you are. Everyone else demanded the absolute biggest, the "X-tra Large" size, until our supply of the huge shirts was exhausted.

I realize that the baggy look is in right now for casual clothes, and I hope this accounts for part of this sartorial preference. But this innocent-seeming fact conjures disturbing images of this assumed "baby boom" generation. Uneasily I see a nation full of filmfans in their mid-years, sprawled out on the couch watching American Movie Classics on the cable, or hour after hour of rented videotapes, all the while munching out on sandwiches, pizza, take-out Chinese, and washing the whole affair down the hatch with a six-pack of Coke or Coors, growing larger as the years unreel.

Captain Kirk may playfully advise us to "Get a life for ourselves," beyond our cultish film addictions, but in reality this is life for many of us. Doesn't matter if it's *Star Trek*, *Godzilla*, Hong Kong action, Superman, or even Bela Lugosi! This is a big meaningful chunk of what life has been for us baby boomers since the 1960s, and home video just made the old ways harder to change. Since we don't even walk to the theaters anymore to see this stuff, we get less exercise than any filmgoers of the past. We can buy or even rent our tapes by mail now, and indulge all kinds of urges at home, 24 hours per day, then lay around reading the books and magazines all about our favorite films.

Is it any wonder that, when we venture out to a video store or film convention, we see so many X-tra Large baby boomers blimping around, looking for more tapes to watch, often wearing T-shirts

sporting the title of a popular film or movie magazine? One could speculate all day about why, before we had the current X-Generation there was born the X-tra Large Generation — children of *Shock Theatre*, drive-in movies, and *Famous Monsters*. But such speculation would leave less time for watching videos.

All I can say is that we did get some nice letters about our T-shirts, and there are lots of fans out there who dig this kind of stuff. So much so that we plan to do an article on the many T-shirt producers in an upcoming issue. And I do love getting fun stuff in the mail, and I will personally promote, wear and write about any movie related T-shirts anyone cares to send in.

And...oh, yeah...I wear an X-tra Large.

\*\*\*

This issue is our much-anticipated experiment — a bookazine wherein you receive a *Cult Movies* mag along with a complete media related book. For our trial-run, we've selected a fascinating biography on *George Reeves*, written by one of our favorite film researchers, Jan Henderson. There's a lot more to Mr. Henderson's book than just a re-telling of the *Superman* show. Jan has spent years researching the life, career, and unsettling death of George Reeves. When first offered the Reeves manuscript for possible publication, I read through continuously, unable to take my eyes from this intriguing and sometimes horrifying tale. For some time after reading it, I kept waking up at night thinking about the book. George's career ups and downs, the likelihood of a cover up surrounding his death, and the evidence that his ghost still haunts the house where he died, all combined to make for an eerie true life story that has never yet been told. I wanted this for our *Cult Movies* readers, and I hope you'll find it as enthralling as I did.

Let us know how you like our experiment. If you enjoy the bookazine idea, we'll try to do it at least once a year. Waiting in the wings we have another book — a history of *Azteca Studios of Mexico* and their wide variety of amazing productions.

\*\*\*

Also in this issue we have another treat — *Frank Dello Stritto's* study of the 1930s horror ban in England. This article is truly a collector's item. It was written by Frank in anticipation of publication, but distributed only to a select number of film fans. It was planned for "the next issue of *Photon Magazine*." Unfortunately there never was a next issue, and the article remained dormant for several decades. When we inquired about it, Frank disclosed that no one — not even himself — had a copy of that article any longer, and the work had to be researched and re-written from scratch. "Actually, I'm glad I had to re-do the article," the author told us. "I know I improved it, and it's a much more concise piece than it was the first time around."

Sadly enough, this concludes our series of articles by Frank Dello Stritto, the others having been his detailed essays on Bela Lugosi which ran in *Cult Movies* #'s 9, 10, 11 and 13. Time constraints probably won't allow him to do any more major writing for us on this grand scale, but we hope to have him do some short film & video reviews. He's one of our most popular writers, and we want to keep him in our pages!

We also want to give Loretta King a big "thank you" for allowing us to be the first magazine to interview her. She's a great lady and we're sure you will enjoy her recollections of Bela Lugosi and Ed Wood.

Also, in this issue, we've got a fantastic interview with our favorite movie director, *Fred Olen Ray*. Fred was interviewed by award-winning writer, *Brad Linaweaver* and shares with us the scoop on his latest movies, *Attack Of The Sixty Foot Centerfold* and *Bikini Drive-in*. In future issues Fred will be keeping us up to date with his current projects. And, believe me, he makes a lot of movies. We've always felt that if he had been directing movies in the 1940s, he probably would have directed all of *The Mummy*, *Inner Sanctum*, and *Rondo Hatton* movies at Universal.

In this issue we want to cordially welcome two new advertisers, *Threat Theatre* and *Video Search of Miami*. We hope they will be with for a long time to come. Look for their ads in this issue. Another long time advertiser, *Network Enterprises* is preparing their long-awaited catalog. Look for their ad in this issue.

We also want to thank our unsung heroes, the video reviewers. They perform what is probably the most important function in this magazine: telling you what's hot and what's not!! Some of our favorite reviewers of all time are *Tom Weaver*, *Bryan Senn*, *Matthew Bradshaw*, *Stephen Flacassier* and *Ron Ford*.

Very special thanks must go to our much abused staff: *William Barnett*, for his lifesaving layouts, *Marta Dobrovitz*, for her research wizardry, and *Christine Harrop* for her fast typesetting. We couldn't do it without you guys and gals. Thanks to all.

And back by reader request, we have exciting, exclusive, and up-to-the-minute interviews with creators of the all-new *Godzilla* series at Toho reported by our Japanese film consultant, *David G. Milner*. You can see the *Godzilla* photos anywhere but these Milner interviews are unique and exclusive to *Cult Movies*.

Coming up in our next big issue will be the continuation of our candid interview with our cover artist, *Dave Stevens*, and another sensational front cover designed by *Stevens*. Next issue will be loaded with super surprises, including articles on *Tod Browning*; *Maria Ouspenskaya* by the renowned author *Greg Mank*; all new *Gamma* and *Majin* films; *Pauly Shore* and *Harry Langdon* — the amazing similarities; the intimate, private life of *Lionel "Pinky" Atwill*; and a production history of *Ed Wood's Sinister Urge*. Plus lots more!!! See you in three months!

Michael Copner, Editor-in-Chief.



*Cult Movies' Buddy Barnett on the set of Vampire Wolf, directed by and starring Conrad Brooks. Conrad's instant cult classic, produced by Al Guerrero for Psychocinema Pictures, recently completed filming and features two beautiful new discoveries — Jennifer Knight (above) and Peacha. Both of these knockouts will be featured in our next issue along with complete details on the making of Vampire Wolf.*



# LETTERS

Lisa Mitchell's "Mummy Dearest" (CM #12) brought me a fresh appreciation of that film. Today's overblown remakes, with music videos every 30 seconds hammering one's sensibilities, suffer greatly in comparison to this understated masterpiece.

Please give my regards to the author. As a writer myself I know how much we appreciate feedback!

Sincerely,  
Kiel Stuart  
Stony Brook, NY

I had not bought any previous issues of *Cult Movies* but that cover on issue 12 leapt out and grabbed me. I haven't been so mesmerized by a magazine cover since the 1960s when I used to buy *Famous Monsters*. How did Dave Stevens do it? Can you get him to do a similar job on Karloff's *The Ghoul*?

This issue was a treat for Karloff fans. I've been one since 1967 when I discovered my first issue of *FM*. Your interview with Sara Karloff and Cynthia Lindsay was a fascinating glimpse into the actor's off-screen life. The newspaper articles were a great idea, full of intriguing pieces of information. A still of Karloff as Rasputin? What a scoop. I've never seen a still of him in that role before. All of the newspaper cuttings were from British newspapers — does that mean you have a contributor over here who's a big Karloff fan? If so, can you help me to get in touch with him?

The Karloff top-tens were another wonderful idea. As well as the classics, they included some unexpected curios. Quite why anyone would list some of these among Karloff's greatest films is a mystery to me, but it's good to know that the means different things to different people.

Perhaps your Karloff contributors can help me track down some elusive videos. Is *Graft* a lost film? I've never met anyone who's seen it. How about *Young Donovan's Kid*, in which Karloff plays a slimy dope-pusher — he looks marvelous in stills I have from this film. Or *The Guilty Generation*, with Karloff as a mean-looking gangster? Or *The Cohens And Kellys In Hollywood* and *Gift Of Gab*. Surely, somebody somewhere has prints of these early talkies.

If you should print this letter, please include my full address; I would love to hear from other Karloff fans, in particular those interested in selling/buying/exchanging Karloff memorabilia.

Best wishes for your magazine,

Neil Pettigrew  
19 Little Brownings  
Forest Hill  
London SE23 3XJ  
England

It's always been obvious from his artwork that Dave Stevens is a true film lover, and your interview with him merely confirms the fact. Keep him doing your covers. Is there any chance you could get him writing for your mag? Film and video reviews? Anything?

Wiley LeMaster  
Akron, OH

Just bought your special edition book on "Superboy & Superpup." What a neat idea for a book. I've just seen the videos of these pilot shows, and I can certainly see why Superpup never got

picked up by the networks, or for syndication. That show would scare the hell out of the young kids, with those oversized dog-puppets and the overall strange nature of the production, the voices, etc. This was aimed at young toddlers?

However, I can't understand why the *Superboy* pilot never put the series over. It was a good, finished product, no worse than those final episodes of the Reeves *Superman* series. John Rockwell as the Boy of Steel would have caught on with the teenagers of the time.

Your book was filled with rare photos and interesting information, and I enjoyed reading those 12 unfilmed scripts showing what the *Superboy* TV show might have been.

Thanks,  
William Thomas  
Los Angeles, CA

A few issues back you ran an interview with the Asian delight, Jade East. Since then there's been very little in print about her — can you bring me up to date on her?

Sam Schad,  
New York, NY

*(Jade is beautiful! She may be appearing in a vampire movie with our own Conrad Brooks in the very near future. In the meantime, you can join her Jade East fan club, which will keep you posted about her activities. Send \$24, money order only, to: Jade East, PO Box 7295, Alhambra, CA 91802. For your effort she says she'll write you right back, "...sending two sexy 8x10 pictures, a personalized letter, and a naughty pair of my panties! You'll receive updates on new projects I'm doing, a list of my erotic products, and other news about my upcoming projects." Tell her Cult Movies sent ya!)*

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# MOVIE & VIDEO REVIEWS

## Crossroad Avenger

(1951, Tucson Kid Productions) Written and Directed by Edward D. Wood Jr., Produced by Lew Dubin, Associate Producer: John E. Clarke; Photography by Ray Flin.

Starring Tom Keene & Tom Tyler. Featuring Lyle Talbot, Harvey Dunn, Kenne Duncan, Don Nagel, Forbes Murray, Bud Osborne & a cameo by Ed Wood. (color, 25 minutes)

*Crossroad Avenger* was the pilot episode for a proposed *Tucson Kid* television series based on the B-Westerns that Ed Wood loved so much in his youth. Wood wrote and directed *Crossroad Avenger* and even managed to cast it with many of his favorite actors from the old westerns. His star, Tom Keene, was a veteran star of many B-Westerns and later went on to appear in Wood's masterpiece *Plan 9 From Outer Space*.

Tom Tyler had been a huge western star in the '30s and played Captain Marvel and The Phantom in the serials. He also played the mummy in *The Mummy's Hand* in 1940. Crippling arthritis had forced his semi-retirement from films when Ed Wood talked him into appearing in *Crossroad Avenger*.

Other Ed Wood favorites appearing in *Crossroad Avenger* include Kenne Duncan, Lyle Talbot and Bud Osborne. They all went on to appear in other Ed Wood projects over the years. Also, look for Ed Wood himself in a fleeting cameo as a pony express rider.

*Crossroad Avenger* was a typical B western at a time when B-Westerns were becoming extinct. The plot is a standard one, but nearly all of the action takes place off screen and in typical Ed Wood fashion everybody just stands around talking about stuff that already happened. At the end, an inept shootout takes place, directed in the usual Ed Wood style. *Crossroad Avenger* is fun as Wood's take on the B-Western genre; later he would give us Horror (*Bride Of The Monster*), Film Noir (*Jail Bait*), Juvenile Delinquents (*Violent Years, Hellborn*), Science Fiction (*Plan 9*), Social Commentary (*Glen Or Glenda*) and Sex (*Orgy Of The Dead*).

Wood completed two more episodes of the *Tucson Kid* TV series but it never sold and was discontinued. Wood later tried to edit the series into a feature film but nobody was interested. However, the three episodes did run on local TV stations in the early 1950s. Unfortunately, the two follow-up episodes seem to be lost. *Crossroad Avenger* is available direct from *Cult Movies* magazine for \$9.95 post paid. Send check or money order to *Cult Movies*, 6201 Sunset Blvd, Suite 152, Hollywood, CA 90028.

## Naked Pursuit (KOFUN)

(World Eiga Films of Japan, 1968, Planned and produced by Shunichi Naho, Dir by Toshio Okuwaki, with Mari Aoki.)

I've lost count of the number of times when a young producer of shot-on-video "thrillers" will complain that, "If only I had bigger budgets I could make really good films!" Or, "If only I could get better scripts I could make really good films!" The Full Moon library is made of excuses like this.

Here is a film that rips these excuses to shreds. *Naked Pursuit* is a film featuring two people. It was shot almost entirely on one beach setting. It probably contains 10 lines of dialogue. As such it must have been one of the most economical films ever produced, and it is utterly fascinating to behold.

The scenario is simple. An escaped convict walking near the coastline sees a beautiful young girl wandering aimlessly. Full of lust he approaches her and she begins to run as comprehension dawns. He catches her and savagely rapes her. Ironically, the girl was at the beach to commit suicide. However, the rape shocks the girl out of her death wish and forces her to re-evaluate her outlook as she recognizes some of the passions of life. The End.

The film is black and white, in scope and presented

DESPERATELY SHE RAN, TRYING TO ESCAPE THE BURNING DESIRE SHE KNEW WOULD SOON DESTROY HER INNOCENCE.

## NAKED PURSUIT



letterboxed on this videotape. Every shot seems carefully composed and looks like a painting. A story is told — a personal revelation unfolds with hardly a word spoken. And the process is thoroughly engrossing.

No doubt the lack of dialog to translate made this film a very desirable property to Harry Novak who released it in America through his Boxoffice International distribution in 1968. Because of its theme and thoughtful construction, this film is timeless and will never lose its value or appeal. Available through Something Weird Video.

## I Blue Girl

(Japanese language, animation)

This tape features two episodes of XXX sex and splatter animation from Japan. Teenage karate girls get themselves into every kind of perilous, sexy predicament with supernatural creatures. In one scene the girls fire their pubic hair like porcupine quills, killing demonic rapists! The situations are sexy and utterly fantastic, venturing into realms where American animation fears to tread. If you haven't tried Japanimation of this adult variety, here's a good place to start (\$19.95 plus \$2.05 postage from; Threat Theatre International, P. O. Box 7633, Olympia WA 98507)

## Poor Cecily

(Alpha France Productions Dir by F. C. Perl, with Angela Field, Sandy Dempsey. Color, 73 min.)

Here is a kinky '70s softcore masterpiece with sex slaves in Renaissance France tortured as witches! This is a fairly big budget affair, very artfully designed. Therefore, the romance and sex scenes are a bit ro-coco, self-conscious and stage-bound, and not quite as erotic as they could be.

What this film is famous for is the one scene in the dungeon, with women being forced to confess to acts of witchery. There are naked women in cages, naked women forced into the iron maiden, and naked women spread-eagled on the rack being whipped and burned for their refusal to confess. The character of Cecily is even raped (in softcore fashion) by two men while spread out on this rack — a situation which cannot even be spoken about in America's overly cautious porn of the 1990s, let alone acted out in stark portrayals such as these!

If this sounds like it's your idea of a good time, you can order it on VHS (\$19.95 plus \$2.05 shipping from; Threat Theatre, P. O. Box 7633, Olympia WA 98507-7633. They're a new advertiser with us, so please tell 'em you read about their stuff in *Cult Movies* mag!)

## Beast Of Babylon Against The Son Of Hercules

(1964, Dir by Siro Marcellini, with Gordon Scott, Moira Orfei, Genevieve Grad)

In this sword and sandal epic, the true heir to the throne of Babylon fights against the current King to stop his human sacrifices and avenge his father's death.

Made at the same time as *Tyrant Of Lydia Against The Son Of Hercules*, this movie shares the same sets, costumes and much of the plot. Someone with more time on their hands than I do might be able to edit the two movies together into one long film. Both movies are fine examples of the "Gladiator" films that finished up the series, but that doesn't make them any more vital watching. The meteorite at the beginning of the film might lead you to think you're getting something supernatural, but it's never brought up again. The sets are nice, obviously well-made so they could film numerous movies on the same lot. The money they saved on sets went into costumes which, while a little too flamboyant to be in character, are nice to look at. If you haven't seen too many other movies in this end of the genre, you will probably enjoy it.

Gordon Scott goes through the paces very well. He's beginning to loosen up a little in his serious portrayal of these characters just as the series is coming to an end. Scott's in no way playing it for laughs, but he's not the wooden soldier that he was in the first films. They even have a scene where he takes his shirt off, something excluded from most of the Gladiator films. Unfortunately the pose they leave him in, arms stretched out, chest thrown out and back flexed, could make just about any marginally well built actor look all that much better. Inasmuch as this is the '60s, it's usually a fair bet that the ladies will have more than enough eye shadow smeared on. In a couple of scenes, it appears that not even Scott was able to get away from the make-up department's handiwork above the eyes. (A nice new tape, transferred from the film, is available from Sinister Cinema.)

Reviewed by Stephen Flaccasier

## Atlas In The Land Of The Cyclops

(1961, dir by Leonviola, with Gordon Mitchell, Chelo Alonso, Vera Silenti, Germano Longo, and Little Fabio)

Machiste comes to the aid of a Queen and her infant son when their country is overthrown and they're going to be thrown into a pit for a Cyclops dinner.

Not too remarkable an entry into the series, but the Cyclops makes it worth watching. Like some other movies featuring "Machiste," the more commercial name of "Atlas" replaced it in the main title. As usual, a try at establishing any sort of continuity between this movie and any other Machiste adventure is a futile attempt. Even in the good release prints, the words rarely match lips, and not even during a dance



number do they get it right. The hands of drummers are so far off from the music being played, it's hard to tell if they even tried to match it up. Character's names change throughout the film. The shepherd that Machiste leaves the baby with seems to be called Philonius at the start of the film and Heronios later on.

Gordon Mitchell, born Charles Pendelton in Colorado, was just starting out with two movies coming out this same year. Unfortunately, his skill as an actor in this film is not much to speak of. His movements are stiff and his reactions to things is wooden. When Mitchell stands still, it's more of a lame pose than a natural stance.

The black bodybuilder who plays Mumba, the henchman, is former Mr. Universe Paul Wynter. His build is actually a lot better than Mitchell, who Wynter picks up and carries off screen at one point! He went on to play in at least one other film but, unlike Vadis or Steel, who started out the same way, never got more than just a supporting role.

Chelo Alonso and Vera Silenti are the female leads but not given anything to do. Chelo always had a unique appearance, with her rounded face, large eyes and dramatic cheekbones. By this time, a few years into the series, her age is beginning to show and the qualities that made her distinctive before aren't as complementary now. Her role is the same as always, the evil queen who falls for the hero but is simply beyond redemption. Vera Silenti plays Penope with the same wide-eyed concern for her baby boy, but is given little else to do. This is not the first film where these actresses have played opposite each other, and their character relationships are almost the same in every movie.

With the low budgets on these films it's surprising that the Cyclops came out looking as well as it did. There's some clever perspective work done which, while not 100% successful, does make the Cyclops look much larger than it really was. Scenes from the battle are used in *The Witches Curse* but Mitchell's face gets edited out and Kirk Morris's put in. (Available from Network Enterprises).

Reviewed by Stephen Flaccasser

## America's Deadliest Home Video

(Random Films, 1995, with Danny Bonaduce, Melora Walters, Mick Wynnhoff, dir. by Jack Perez.)

Here is an instant cult classic if ever there was one! The plot follows the story of Doug (Danny Bonaduce), a man who obsessively videotapes everything he sees, including his wife's (played by real life wife Gretchen Bonaduce) extramarital love affair. Hitting the road, he inadvertently records a group of murderous felons pushing their getaway car over a cliff. The gang takes him hostage and forces him to videotape their crime spree as they rob and murder their way across America. Seen entirely through the eye of Doug's video camera, Doug and the viewer are drawn into a dark world of violence and terror as the story climaxes in the perfect, macabre satire of the cops-meet-Rodney-King generation.

A field day for actors and director, this one is sure to find an audience among the fans of made-for-video thriller and suspense product. (Available in video stores, or direct from Random Films; call (414) 634-5774.)

## Bad Girls Dormitory

(1984, Active Home Video)

Written and Directed by Tim Kincaid, Starring Carey Zuris, Teresa Farley, Natalie O'Connell, Marita, Rick Gianisi, Dan Barclay.

Yet another entry in the "women in prison" genre. There's no story here, just a situation. The inmates of the New York Female Juvenile Reformatory (all of whom seem a bit old for juvenile detention) take showers, have cat fights, take showers, shoot up, take showers, have sex with guards, take showers, have sex with each other, take... well, you get the idea.

Amidst all this personal hygiene we learn that most of the inmates have been put away due to the actions of someone else, usually a man. This lame attempt at a feminist theme seems out of place, and thankfully is never expanded upon. In fact, nothing is expanded upon, thanks to a complete and total lack of

plot.

There's a state inspector (Gianisi) who seems to have a genuine concern for the inmates, but all he manages to do is wander around the facility ogling the prisoners in various states of undress. Dr. DeMarco (Barclay) spends most of his time shooting up and taking sexual advantage of the inmates, as do his nurse and most of the guards. The director of the facility Miss Madison (Marita) remains oblivious to all this, stoically proclaiming that her staff is incapable of such acts.

Security seems pretty lax, as the prisoners are free to leave their cells and wander anywhere they like. Credibility is stretched even further with an inmate who successfully conceals, not only her pregnancy, but also the newly born baby, and a butch female guard who wears spiked heels as part of her uniform.

Sure, there's plenty of nudity and some violence, but both are presented in such a pedestrian fashion that they fail to grab the viewer's attention. *Bad Girls Dormitory* wants to be trashy but falls short of the mark. In addition to having no direction or point whatsoever, this movie doesn't even have the guts to be offensive.

Review by Matthew Bradshaw

## Beyond The Door

(1975, Media Home Entertainment)

Directed by Oliver Hellman, Starring Juliet Mills, Richard Johnson, David Colin Jr., Gabriele Lavia, Nino Segurini, Elizabeth Turner, Carla Mancini, Barbara Fiorini, Joan Acti, Vittorio Fanfoni.

An *Exorcist* rip-off with elements of *Rosemary's Baby* thrown in for good measure. Jessica (Juliet Mills, sister of Hayley Mills), her husband Robert (Lavia), and their two kids seem like a normal family. The weirdness commences, however, once Jessica finds out that she is pregnant. She begins levitating, eating rotten banana peels, and generally doing things considered awkward in most social situations. In a few scenes, Jessica actually outdoes Linda Blair: the head

(continued)

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spinning sequence is creepier than the one in *The Exorcist*, and Jessica takes projectile regurgitation to the next logical step by eating her own vomit.

The satanic influence spreads through the household, providing Jessica's son (Colin) with an "imaginary" friend much like the one seen (or rather not seen) in *The Amityville Horror*. One of the film's best moments has a group of dolls coming to life to terrorize the children.

Dimitri, Jessica's ex-lover, is at least partially responsible for all these goings on. He's down to the last few days of his pact with the Devil, and old scratch has offered him a little more time on Earth if he safeguards the birth of Jessica's demonic child.

The most interesting aspect of this film is the casting. Jessica, the bile-chucking, obscenity spewing object of Satan's attention, is played by Juliet Mills, perhaps best known for her performance as the goody two shoes nanny in the sitcom *Nanny And The Professor*. Dimitri is played by Richard Johnson who appeared in *The Haunting* and *Zombie*, two films at completely opposite ends of the horror spectrum.

All in all a creepy, if somewhat slow, movie. The alleged sequel *Beyond the Door 2* (originally titled *Shock* and directed by the great Mario Bava) has nothing to do with the original except it also stars the often-annoying David Colin Jr.

Reviewed by Matthew Bradshaw

## "If Only There Was Some Light..." The Devil Rides Out

Terence Fisher's 1967 work *The Devil Rides Out* (aka *The Devil's Bride*; Hammer Studios thought American audiences would perceive the film as a western if the original title was kept) was Hammer's first adaptation of the works of author Dennis Wheatley. Wheatley was so impressed by the cinematic translation of his 1934 novel that he did not sell, but simply gave Christopher Lee the film rights to the rest of his novels for Lee's production company. The success of the film can be attributed to many components: Lee's and Charles Gray's incredible performances, James Bernard's haunting score, Richard Matheson's jaunty screenplay; yet it is the creative vision of director Terence Fisher which evocatively blends all these elements into a terrifying whole.

The plot of the film revolves around the Duc de Richeleau's (Christopher Lee) attempts to thwart the machinations of satanist Mocata (Charles Gray). Mocata has enticed the Duc's surrogate son Simon into joining his devil worshipping cult and it's up to the Duc and his arcane knowledge to battle against Mocata's insistence on having a thirteenth member for the coven. The conflict swings back and forth as Black Masses, mind control spiritual possession and blood sacrifices all become a new reality to the Duc and his friends.

The real focus of the film is the swaying strife between the forces of good and evil. In almost all of Fisher's films, the viewer is presented with the purest depictions of the divine and the profane. For Fisher, these abstract categories become lucid absolutes forever struggling for dominance. Fisher tries not to blur the distinctions of the righteous and the wicked (Baron Frankenstein skirts the line) yet his agents of virtue (the Duc, Van Helsing) aren't the stereotypical milquetoasts either. The presence and power of evil is very tangible and darkness is a living dynamic force (In one scene, a vicious psychic attack forces Simon to choke himself with a crucifix hanging around his neck). Skepticism is a hindrance to good, not evil. Resisting belief adds to the influence of impiety, eclipsing the light of faith and corrupting the champions of benevolence (The Duc calls the skeptical Richard Eaton the "weakest link" in their collective front). The film reinforces traditional Christian values: A glowing cross appears during and after the inferno which engulfs Mocata and his followers; Tannith is resurrected after her spirit has accepted Jesus Christ; and the last two lines of the film have Simon thanking God and the Duc answers, "Yes Simon, he is the one we must thank...". Some may scoff at or dismiss such a didactic denouement, yet it is a refreshingly positive



Lon Chaney, Jr. and John Carradine in *Hillbillies in a Haunted House* (1967).

sentiment in a genre filled with cynicism and nihilism.

The performances in *The Devil Rides Out* are uniformly creditable with Lee and Gray as the obvious standouts. Lee does a complete turnaround from his magnetically malevolent Count Dracula roles to play the dashing heroic Duc de Richeleau, an elegant intellectual with the deductive perceptions of Sherlock Holmes and the bravado of James Bond. Gray's Mocata (loosely based on Aleister Crowley) is chillingly suave, a menacing manipulating mastermind overseeing blasphemous events with supreme satisfaction. In one memorable scene, Mocata utters an impressive speech about the relationship between science, magic and the dominance of will as he hypnotizes Mrs. Eaton and mentally commands Simon and Tannith to attack their guardians (Fisher uses a high-angle zoom into Mocata's eyes to emphasize his sinister influence). Both men are portrayed as highly imaginative and inventive, yet the Duc's compassion and courage help him end Mocata's abominable deeds.

Fisher's technique in *The Devil Rides Out* ranks with his greatest work. From the ominous opening titles of red billowing smoke and occult runes to the ethereal, enlightened ending, Fisher proves his mastery of suggestive horror using a variety of camera angles, musical cues, lighting and scenery to compound terror upon terror. Fisher eschews his usual turn-of-the-century Gothic mis-en-scene of castles, laboratories and grave yards for the stately mansions, biplanes and roadsters of the 1920s. The most effective sequence in *The Devil Rides Out* is the attempted devil baptism of Simon. The summoning of the Devil (a hideous goat headed man) is genuinely frightening, but it is the cinematic rhythm established by Fisher which is truly provocative. Fisher first presents frenzied order (the Dionysian dancing rite of the Devil worshippers), then shatters it with calculated anarchy (the Duc's gangbusting rescue of Simon and Tannith).

Another impressive sequence is Mocata's black magic attack on the Eaton house to retrieve Simon and Tannith. Fisher's camera circles around the protective magic ring containing the Duc and his friends as a series of phantasms try to entice them out of the defensive disk. In one scene, Fisher uses slow motion and low angle shots to showcase a truly horrific Angel of Death riding a horse. Yet the sequence also contains two of the weak points of the film. A scene where a "giant" spider attacks the magic circle is revealed as an inept camera trick using a tarantula. A very questionable plot flaw emerges as the Duc's careful preparation for Mocata's supernatural offensive omits the Eaton's young daughter Peggy from the magic circle leading to her abduction by Mocata.

*The Devil Rides Out* is a beautiful exercise in sophisticated style, heart stopping suspense and insidious

atmosphere. Terence Fisher was one of the last great filmmakers to make the viewer feel the impending doom of darkness as well as the hope of a new dawn rising.

Reviewed by William Burns

## Hillbillies in a Haunted House

(1967, Woolner Brothers) With Lon Chaney, Jr., John Carradine, Basil Rathbone

Country-western entertainers Boots Malone (Joi Lansing) and Woody Weatherby (Ferlin Husky) and Weatherby's jittery business manager Jeepers (Don Bowman), en route to the Nashville Jamboree, are forced to take a night's shelter in the "haunted" Beauregard mansion. In the basement, a quartet of spies (John Carradine, Lon Chaney, Jr., Linda Ho, Basil Rathbone) have set up shop and are preparing to steal secrets from the missile plant in a neighboring town. The baddies try to scare off the hillbillies, but, with the help of an agent (Richard Webb) from M.O.T.H.E.R. (Master Organization To Halt Enemy Resistance) and a real ghost, the hillbillies thwart the spy plan.

Three movie fads of the 1960s — hillbilly music, horror and espionage — are lumped together in this sequel to the Woolner Brothers' *Las Vegas Hillbillies* (1966). The respective lineups of singing and horror stars were both first-rate, even if the vehicle itself doesn't come within a country-western mile of respectability. While country music fans could (presumably) derive some pleasure from the East Side Kid-ish plot and the antics of heavies Carradine, Rathbone and Chaney, horror fans were less pleased with the hillbillies' habit of breaking into song at the drop of a guitar pick. (Apart from Husky, Lansing and Bowman's poorly-dubbed, echo chamber-ish songs, a group of passersby drop in at the mansion and sing two, and Merle Haggard and Jim Kent are seen singing on TV. After the spies have been rounded up and the movie appears to be at an end, a "Nashville Jamboree" and a half-dozen more songs are still laying ahead for fidgety horror fans anxious to get on with their lives.)

Most movies of this type require their heavies to play it straight but *Hillbillies* allows Carradine, Chaney and Rathbone to indulge in a bit of welcome self-spoofing: Chaney plays with his pet ape Anatole (George Barrows), Rathbone enthuses about their next assignment in Alamogordo ("The dry climate will be wonderful for my sinuses!") and Carradine, told by Ho that they are abandoning their haunted house operations, boyishly begs to fly the prop ghost one last time. All three appear to be having a good time — even the sometimes curmudgeonly Rathbone, who probably didn't know he would be the bottom-

(continued)



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billed heavy (even Ho is above him on the cast list!). The comic "high point" may be a scene of Bowman gawking with amazement as leering close-up images of the baddies begin mysteriously appearing on his portable TV. In addition to the spy elements in its plot, *Hillbillies* also spoofs then-current spy shows like *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (the acronym M.O.T.H.E.R.) and *Get Smart* (Bowman mimics Don Adams' signature line "Sorry about that, Chief!"). Carradine taunts Chaney's gorilla throughout (and in one scene steals its banana!), and then meets his end in the beast's hairy bear-hug à la *Captive Wild Woman*. He also screws up at one point, calling Rathbone "George" instead of "Gregor."

The Woolner Brothers opened offices at Producers Studio (home of the AIP Poe movies) on November 7, 1966, to prepare *Hillbillies* (initially called *Ghost Party*), which went into production on November 30. The film is sometimes listed as Rathbone's last but *Autopsia de un Fantasma*, made in early 1967, followed. (Rathbone worked two weeks on *Hillbillies*, earning \$5,000 a week. The total budget was \$240,000.) It was the final feature for director Jean Yarbrough, who worked with nearly all of the horror greats during his long career. The world premiere of *Hillbillies* was held in Louisville, Kentucky, on May 15, 1967, simultaneously with multiple openings in the Redstone Circuit of theaters in that area. Joi Lansing made public appearances at two of the houses that evening.

Let's let John Carradine review this one: "I suppose it was crap but we had to do it."

*Reviewed by Tom Weaver*

## The Bride and the Beast

(1958, Allied Artists) With Charlotte Austin, Lance Fuller

Edward D. Wood furnished the screenplay for *The Bride and the Beast*, a dull story of reincarnation produced during the mid-1950s "Bridey Murphy" craze but not released until long after public interest had waned. Lance Fuller plays a wild-animal hunter whose new bride (Charlotte Austin) seems to have great simpatía for Spanky, the brutish gorilla Fuller keeps caged in the torch-lit basement of his secluded castle-like home. (One critic quipped, "[This] can hardly be considered a compliment to her husband.") As the wedding night (and the film) drag on, Austin's thoughts seem to be more with the oversized monkey than with her new hubby ("Think Spanky's afraid of the storm?" she asks as he's about to carry her over bedroom threshold); Spanky later breaks out of its cage and is affectionately petting and examining Austin when Fuller awakens and shoots it to death. ("Fine wedding night I've given you!" Austin admonishes herself, as if any of this were her fault.) When Dr. Carl Reiner (sic), played by William Justine, hypnotizes and regresses Austin, she recalls a great many stock shots of jungles and animals "which you also will recall without much effort" (*The Hollywood Reporter*). None too subtly, it's becoming clear that Austin was a gorilla in a past life; and on a later combination African safari/honeymoon (punishingly padded with more stock footage), Austin is willingly abducted by a gorilla and carried off into "gorilla country," where she'll presumably live happily ever after. Fuller returns alone to the States, where (with typical Ed Wood phraseology) the doctor-hypnotist tells him, "That she had been a gorilla in a past life seems rather positive!"

Most reviewers, and the Catholic Legion of Decency, seemed rather positive that they were turned off by the unsavory bestial implications of the story. Even fans who are not offended by the premise will be alienated by the movie's pall of almost indescribable dullness. Wood or director Adrian Weiss, who wrote the original story, finds excuse after excuse for the utilization of animal stock footage (flashbacks, Austin's dreams, the safari, etc.), which unspools endlessly; some of it is negatively printed, to create an "other-worldly" effect. (The footage is from the Sabu movie *Man-Eater of Kumaon*, 1948.) There's room for a little of everything in this balmy plot, including some quintessentially "Woodian" endorsements for angora, with which Austin's character is obsessed ("soft

like kitten's fur!").

Even the hypnosis/regression scene, which the filmmakers probably saw as the movie's "big" moment, plays boringly; *Bride and the Beast* is the wrong movie in which to feature a character exhorting "sleep...sleep..."

*Reviewed by Tom Weaver*

## The Man Who Turned to Stone

(1957, Columbia) With Victor Jory, Charlotte Austin, William Hudson

It's easy to have a soft spot in one's heart (head?) for *The Man Who Turned to Stone* if you're partial to the cheap chillers that Sam Katzman ground out for Monogram in the 1940s; this 1957 horror adventure (produced by, who else?, Katzman) recreates that low-rent ambience remarkably well. (It's too bad that this fairly lively, sometimes grisly script wasn't around back then, when the star lineup might have included Katzman standbys Lugosi, Carradine and Zucco.) This "Amazing Story From The Blackest Annals of Unholy Medicine" is set at the La Salle Detention Home for Girls, where the only thing more unusual than the all-WASP prison population is the high death rate ("heart attacks") among the healthy young female inmates. The front office houses the killers: Victor Jory and his staff (Ann Doran, Paul Cavanagh, Victor Varconi, George Lynn, Frederick Ledebur) will occasionally abduct a girl during the night and, in a scientifically equipped attic room, drain her life energies to prolong their own existences. (The high death rate, the grumblings of the inmates, a deluxe on-premises morgue and even screams in the night fail to arouse suspicion in the institution's guards, matrons and other workers.) Inmate Jean Willes finally confides her fears in social welfare worker Austin, whose nosing-around earns her a pink slip from Jory. But her replacement, psychiatrist William Hudson, shares her sentiments about the "jinxed" institution and proceeds, with Austin's help, to do some snooping of his own.

Nothing spectacular (or even close) was achieved by *Man Who Turned to Stone*, but it has an appealingly lurid premise (mad scientists preying on nubile reformatory girls) and a dark, seedy undercurrent, plus a murder-a-reel, "bodies-everywhere" storyline which gives the bare-bones production a nice, morbid atmosphere. Victor Jory, one of the more respectable screen heavies, dresses up the movie just with his presence, and he's backed in his villainy by George Lynn, screen old-timer Victor Varconi, Paul Cavanagh and Frederick Ledebur as a brutish, towering servant (a scientist himself before he became a casualty of an early experiment). Reminiscent of Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931) is the way that changes in lighting bring out the skull-life "horror" makeups on the faces of fast-aging Cavanagh and Ledebur — an economical yet effective process. Intriguing, too, are scenes of Hudson perusing Cavanagh's diary, from which he learns that the 220-year-old Cavanagh was born in 1733 (which places the movie's action in 1953; maybe that's when it was written). The scientists' unholy alliance began, according to the diary, in the 1780s, when the group came together in Paris to work with the Count Saint Germaine. (The mysterious real-life 18th-century chemist and adventurer has more recently been busily acting as the protagonist of a series of historical romance "women's novels" in which he's depicted as a vampire.)

The movie, which began production on October 15, 1956, was released on a twin-bill with *Zombies of Mora Tau* (another semi-spooky, efficiently-made Katzman credit) the following March, finding few friends in the critical community. For me, one of the more interesting things about it is the fact that Frederick Ledebur appears in it (playing the monster, no less!). The European stage actor, born at the turn of the century, had a long affair with actress/author/poet Iris Tree and married her in 1934; they led a roving existence in Austria, Ireland and elsewhere. (Their marriage ended in divorce.) Later in life Ledebur was a frequent guest on Cecil de Rothschild's yacht in the company of Greta Garbo, who used to walk naked on shore, sending Ledebur ahead to warn her

of approaching peasants. (On one occasion, Garbo, Ledebur and famed photographer Sir Cecil Beaton were spotted skinny-dipping in a cove by a boatload of tourists.) Ledebur's films included (on one level) John Huston's *Moby Dick*, Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits* and Visconti's *Ludwig*, and on another level (ours!), *The 27th Day*, *Voodoo Island* and *The Man Who Turned to Stone*. The nobleman/sportsman/big game hunter/stage actor/Katzman regular died in the mid-1980s, survived by a countess-wife.

*Reviewed by Tom Weaver*

## The Valley of Gwangi

(1969, Warners) With James Franciscus, Gila Golan, Richard Carlson

The cast and crew of *The Valley of Gwangi* (1969) got a nice trip to Spain out of that experience, but all that monster fans got was the storyline of *King Kong* unapologetically served up to them for the umpteenth time. Pioneer dinosaur animator Willis O'Brien had sought to bring his tale "Gwangi" to the screen as far back as the early '40s, but it didn't begin principal production until 1967 — five years after O'Brien's fatal heart attack (talk about stop motion!). The basic premise showed its true age, however, having roots that went back to *Kong* and *beyond*, into the silent era (*The Lost World*, 1925). Had the film been made as planned in the '40s (James Craig and Anne Shirley would have starred), the plot may conceivably have squeaked by, but the passage of a quarter century — and the interval appearances of *Mighty Joe Young*, *Gorgo*, *The Beast of Hollow Mountain* et al. — left *Gwangi* without a single plot contrivance which wasn't an off-recycled cliché.

As in *Kong* (and others), the main characters are showmen, the proprietors and "cast" of a financially wobbly Wild West show playing at the turn of the century in south-of-the-Rio Grande arenas. (Gila Golan is the show's pretty equestrienne-star, Richard Carlson the emcee and Golan's protective father figure.) From the nearby "Forbidden Valley" comes an Eohippus — a tiny horse thought extinct since the days of the dinosaurs — upon which the troupe pins its hopes for future solvency. (Who'd want to see an Eohippus from the back row of an arena? Or even the front row?) Stolen by superstitious Gypsies and returned to the Valley, the Eohippus becomes the object of a search by the showmen (led by pretty-boy con man James Franciscus, playing an irritating, inconsistent character). Instead they find flying lizards and other prehistoric monsters, the most fearsome of which is the purple, jaw-snapping allosaurus Gwangi. Captured and put on display in the Wild West show, Gwangi (of course) escapes, rampages through the streets and bursts into a Catholic cathedral in yet another mock-*King Kong* moment. Franciscus starts a fire and the stone cathedral inexplicably goes up like a house of straw, cremating the shrieking Gwangi.

Ray Harryhausen's fine stop motion effects were the real stars of the Warner Bros.-Seven Arts release but everything else was second- or third-rate, with frequent zoom shots and the poor post-dubbing of all the actors creating an unmistakable climate of shoddiness. Worst of all was the script (adapted from the O'Brien story). Perhaps out of a desire to pay homage to O'Brien, or out of a perceived need to "preserve" the ritual plot elements of the genre, or (most likely) out of sheer laziness, screenwriter William E. Bast takes every situation and character (animal and reptile) from stock. What worked in the past is expected to work again here; for instance, an elephant spied in a corner of the frame prior to "Gwangi the Great"'s public unveiling is bound to be drawn into a losing fight with the allosaurus, the identical scene in Harryhausen's *20 Million Miles to Earth* having been a hit with audiences. Hackneyed, easy-to-digest storylines may have been a point in favor of pocket-sized, hit-and-run dinosaur flicks (some of the Japanese cheapies, for example), but to find one in a self-proclaimed Dinosaur Movie Event like *Gwangi* bespeaks a degree of contempt for the fans. (Its promotion as "the first sci-fi Western" also didn't sit well with viewers who recalled *The Beast of Hollow Mountain*.)

(continued)





tain, made more than a dozen years before.)

Presumably many fans returned that contempt: Like Richard Carlson's impoverished Wild West show, the G-rated adventure played to lots of empty seats. Even the one decent thing about the film, Harryhausen's effects, was roundly bashed by reviewers and by at least one cast member. William Wolf reported in *Cue* that the special effects monsters were "not quite menacing enough to wake the post-midnight sleeping population in a 42nd Street theatre," *Variety's* Brad griped, "[The] special effects are crude, poor imitations of any number of earlier films," and Richard Carlson told Mark McGee (*Photon*), "I didn't think the [special effects] were altogether satisfactory."

Reviewed by Tom Weaver

### Thriller: "The Incredible Doktor Markesan"

(1962, MCA/Universal Home Video)

Starring Boris Karloff, Dick York, Caroline Kearney.

Made over 30 years after his ground breaking performance in *Frankenstein*, this episode of the *Thriller* TV series proves that Boris Karloff still knew how to creep out an audience. Karloff was the regular narrator of this horror anthology, but "The Incredible Doktor Markesan" is one of the few episodes in which he also starred.

Graduate students Fred Bancroft (York) and his wife Molly (Kearney) are down to their last 12 bucks. Fred hopes that his uncle Conrad Markesan (Karloff) will let them stay at his estate until they get back on their feet. Upon arrival, however, they find Markesan's manor in an advanced state of disrepair. The crabgrass is deep enough to get lost in, and a sign out front proclaims that trespassers will be shot on sight.

Dr. Markesan proves to be only slightly more hospitable than the house itself. He agrees to let the two stay, but only if they agree to remain in their room at night. Fred's curiosity gets the better of him though, and one evening he sneaks downstairs. He stumbles upon a meeting between Markesan and three individuals, all of whom Fred learns, have been dead for some time. It seems the good Doktor has been conducting some rather unorthodox experiments.

Based on a short story by August Derleth and Mark Schorer, this one has it all: a creepy old house, a mist-shrouded cemetery, mysterious goings on, and walking dead men. The highlight, of course, is Karloff's performance. One could almost believe that the word "sinister" was invented in his honor. For those not familiar with *Thriller* this is the perfect episode to start with.

Reviewed by Matthew Bradshaw

### I Spy: Mainly On The Plains

Karloff has a better role in this television episode - an NBC production originally broadcast on February 22, 1967 - than he got in many of his films.

As Don Ernesto Silvano, a thermo-nuclear scientist pursued through Spain by both the Americans and the Russians, he features in almost every scene. A likeable absent-minded professor, obsessed with *Don Quixote*, the role gives Karloff the chance to shine as a comic character, defiantly waving his walking stick at windmills, shouting at a herd of sheep which he imagines to be an army, and attacking a truckload of police whom he thinks are villains. As if in homage to their very English star, scriptwriters Morton Fine and David Friedkin even include a scene in which Karloff sets up a picnic of afternoon tea in the middle of a Spanish field: "I never travel without my tea service".

Bow-legged Boris hobbles around enthusiastically but a stand-in is used in many of the more strenuous moments, such as when he is seen riding pillion on the back of Robert Culp's motorbike or in a fight with staffs against Culp. However, no stand-in was used for the very un-Karloffian scene in which he is thrown onto a blanket and tossed into the air by some peasants.

One scene harks back to the great old mad-scientist days, including the kind of watery-eyed close-up that characterized all those films and a speech that is worth quoting: "I have indeed been under a great



Master of terror Boris Karloff and his wife Evie.

strain. Soon I must make a decision that may affect the fate of the whole world. Oh, I know this sounds like another of my deliriums... but please, you must believe me.... At times the responsibility has been almost unbearable. Have you ever been in an aeroplane flying in and out of patches of cloud? That is how it has been with me, passing through mists that seem to cloud my mind. Please - be patient with me."

Directed with a light touch by Friedkin, the episode is essential viewing for Karloff fans.

Reviewed by Neil Pettigrew

### The Bat

(Allied Artists, 1959) With Vincent Price, Agnes Moorehead. From Sinister Cinema.

Mary Roberts Rinehart's 1908 suspense novel *The Circular Staircase* proved a hardy perennial on stage and screen, where it was seen under that title in 1915, as *The Bat* in 1926 and as *The Bat Whispers* in 1930. The 1959 film version with Vincent Price (again titled *The Bat*) seems today to have been an ill-advised adaptation, although perhaps the thinking behind it was sound (from a box office standpoint): the Price name would draw the same young thrillseekers who made his recent *House on Haunted Hill* a hit, while the aura of "legitimacy" that surrounded the venerable Rinehart property might additionally draw higher-browers who wouldn't be caught dead watching something like *Haunted Hill* or *Terror in the Haunted House*. The former group was probably bitterly disappointed with the Price *Bat*, which (instead of going for cheap, crowd-pleasing shocks) tried to recapture the old-fashioned feeling of theatricality associated with Rinehart's barnstormer.

The *Bat* is a black-hooded, claw-fingered criminal on the trail of \$1,000,000 embezzled out of a local bank. The money has presumably been hidden in a large country house ("The Oaks") presently leased by authoress Agnes Moorehead, and that's the spot where all the folks who might conceivably be the *Bat* persist in converging and colliding: coroner Price, who's already gotten away with the murder of the embezzler; local chief of detectives Gavin Gordon; and enigmatic chauffeur-cumbutler John Sutton. Every cliché in the book is dusted off, set loose on the polished, over-lit sets and parades before Joseph Biroc's camera.

This sort of set-bound sounds-in-the-night hokum probably would have been a great hit at some little summer stock theater, particularly with name stars like Price and Moorehead chewing the scenery, but on movie screens in the Atom Age, it played to young audiences who probably grew restless the moment they figured out the direction it was taking. Price

gives a realistic, laid-back performance compared to the high-flying theatrics of Moorehead and Lenita Lane (wife of director Crane Wilbur, playing Moorehead's companion). But Price quickly becomes too obvious a candidate for Bat-hood: He commits a murder early on, which makes it unlikely that he'll also be responsible for The Bat's murders, and he also experiments with real bats in his laboratory. (Inside a windowed wall space in the lab, he even keeps a giant stuffed bat!), but a fight ensues and Price is shot and killed as he wrestles over the gun. From here on, the now-"Priceless" picture centers unappealingly around the middle-aged biddies (joined by Elaine Edwards and former Little Rascal Darla Hood) as they bustle around "The Oaks" in pajamas, alternately on the trail of (or the run from) The Bat.

Shooting commenced on April 27, 1959, and *The Bat* was in theaters by August, promoted with the puerile ad line "When It Flies... Someone Dies!" Instead of chilling audiences, it generally left them cold (not the same thing).

Reviewed by Tom Weaver

### Rats

1983, Video Treasures

Directed by Vincent Dawn, Starring Richard Raymond, Janna Ryan, Alex McBride, Richard Cross, Ann Gisel Glass, Christopher Bretner, Tony Lombardo, Henry Luciani, Cindy Ledbetter, Chris Fremont, Mouné DuVivier.

I suppose a cross between *Mad Max* and *Willard* must have seemed like a good idea on paper. *Rats: Night of Terror* is the full on-screen title of this Italian science fiction/horror film from the director of Laura Gemser's *Caged Women*. Whatever it's called, though, *Rats* is one dog of a movie.

It's the 23rd century and the world has been ravaged by a nuclear holocaust. A group of scavengers on motorcycles comes across a seemingly abandoned village in the middle of the desert. Inside they find supplies, a water purification system and a green house, everything they could possibly ask for.

Things don't look quite so rosy when our heroes discover the mutilated bodies of the previous inhabitants. The place is swarming with rats, you see, and they've developed a taste for human flesh. Once the bikers realize the danger, they barricade themselves inside, at which point the film degenerates even further into a bad knock-off of *Night of the Living Dead*.

While the basic premise has some merit, director Dawn has neither the budget nor the talent to make it work. The characters are so unrealistic and unlikeable that the viewer will find himself rooting for the rats. In a scene swiped directly from Hitchcock's *The Birds*,



the bikers must walk slowly through a room filled with rats, knowing that the rodents might pounce at any time. By all rights this should be a tense, suspenseful moment, but it occurs so late in this tedious little flick that the viewer just doesn't care what happens.

As uninspired as the performances of the human actors are, the rats have the dubious distinction of being the worst performers in the piece. One would think that having rats portray rats would be the ultimate exercise in method acting, but the furry little buggers just can't seem to pull it off. In the scenes where the critters are supposed to be attacking en masse, they just appear to be milling about. In addition, there are countless scenes where real live rats are kicked, whacked with beer mugs, and even (I'm not making this up) set on fire.

Obviously these are non-union rodents.

Reviewed by Matthew Bradshaw

## The Thirsty Dead

(1974) King of Video

Directed by Terry Becker. Starring Jennifer Billingsley, John Considine, Judith McConnell, Tami Guthrie, Fredericka Meyres, Chiqui da Rosa, Vic Diaz.

Trouble sleeping? Slap this baby into your VCR and you'll feel like you've got lead weights tied to your eyelashes. Once again the Filipino film industry has served up a healthy portion of cinematic tedium.

Four women are captured off the streets of Manila. At first the four believe they are destined for a white slavery ring, but instead find themselves the captives of a blood drinking cult in the heart of the jungle. Laura (Billingsley) is expected to join the cult, while her three friends are destined to become Purina Vampire Chow. The cultists perform weird rites, consult a head in a box (!), and generally bore the viewer silly.

Vic Diaz (who played the devil in Eddie Romero's *Beast of the Yellow Night*) plays a police lieutenant, giving the viewer some hope for the movie, but it's little more than a cameo appearance. *The Thirsty Dead* is also floating around out there under the title *Blood*

*Hunt*, but an open sewer by any other name would smell as rank.

Reviewed by Matthew Bradshaw

## Mindwarp

A Fangoria Film, starring Angus Scrimm, Bruce Campbell and Marta Alicia. Written Henry Dominick, Directed by Steve Barnett. FX by KNB

Fangoria magazine has produced three low-budget horror films. This is the last of the three that I had not yet caught, and the copyright date shows it to be five years old. Perhaps there are more coming, but I am certainly not aware of any. At any rate, their production output has at least slowed down considerably. And looking at the films, it is a small wonder. *Children Of The Night* and *Severed Ties* both had interesting ideas which died of inadequate scripting, bad direction and mediocre production values. *Mindwarp* is about the same, except for the interesting idea part.

The movie opens very much like George Miller's magnificent *The Road Warrior*, with stock footage of atomic explosions and the like, while a voice-over tells us about the awful apocalypse. But there is help, friends, by escaping into Infinisynth; a machine which, when linked to a human mind, will provide a lifetime of entertaining fantasies of your choice to keep you amused until you die.

Then we meet the very sexy Judy Apple (Marta Alicia), who is fed up with the unreal reality of Infinisynth. She rebels against the Systems Operator (a shadowy figure who sits in a big old chair with a hair dryer on his head), and is given her wish to experience reality. She is puked out onto a barren landscape which alternates between desert and glacier, depending on which direction you look. The landscape is studded with crucified skeletons and — of course — bumpy-faced mutants driving modified tractors. They are called "Crawlers," and are another too-obvious visual link to *The Road Warrior*.

Judy gets rescued by Stover (Bruce Campbell in a more serious role than usual), doing his best Mel Gibson. He's an "Outworlder," some guy who has

somehow managed to avoid the ravages of disease and radiation which have devastated the underground-dwelling crawlers. Another thing that sets him apart is that he refuses to eat human flesh — Crawlers are cannibals, you see — so he has put his dead family up on crosses instead of burying them to save them from the Crawlers. For some reason Crawlers, though they are able to drive tractors and forage above ground, don't have the wits to get a body off of a cross for a satisfying meal.

Judy and Stover wind up fighting for their lives underground. Here we learn that the Crawlers are kept in check via a perverse form of Christianity in which they drink real human blood culled from sacrifice victims placed in a giant Quisinar. Their leader is the "Seer" (Angus Scrimm), another Outworlder who has found himself a niche and a modicum of corrupting power by playing Pope to a race of dying monstrosities. The Seer enlists Judy to rule by his side. She turns down the offer. Not too smart. ... It goes on from there, but if I continue I will be giving away a few very predictable surprises.

The script tries to be deep and Freudian, but screenwriter Dominick isn't up to the challenge. His symbols are sloppy and confused. Too much is left unexplored, and far too many questions left unanswered. Why, for instance, is the Seer able to live around the Crawlers and drink their blood with relish from a skull mug and yet not get their diseases? Where are the blissfully-dreaming Infinisynth aristocrats housed, and why haven't they been raided in their electronic sleep by hungry Crawlers? And how come possums thrive so well here (providing food for non-cannibal Bruce Campbell) when humans have become disgusting, disease ravaged mutants? They're mammals too, aren't they? The characters are annoying and the ending is confusing. And wouldn't you be disappointed if it all turned out to be a dream inside the Infinisynth system? Well, it's just possible.

Steve Barnett's direction is weak at best, and Mark Governor's synthesized score is meandering and unexceptional. The FX work by the usually reliable

(continued)

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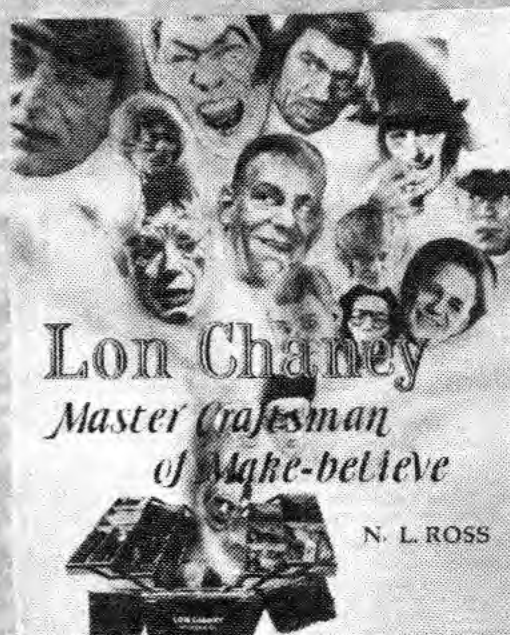
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### DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 61 (#DI-61)\*



Plus



**HIDEOUS SUNDEMON** (1959) Robert Clarke, Patricia Manning, Nan Peterson, Del Courtney. After exposure to radiation, an atomic research scientist finds himself changing into a murderous, lizard-like monster every time he's exposed to the rays of the sun. Cheap, but lovable. Look for the 'rat scene,' which is missing from most prints. Our pre-print material is stunning.

**PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE** (1958) Bela Lugosi, Tor Johnson, Gregory Walcott, Tom Keene, Lyle Talbot, Joanna Lee, Dudley Manlove, Paul Marco. Director Ed Wood's legendary, classic 'baddie.' Not the worst movie ever made, (try watching MESA OF LOST WOMEN or THE ATOMIC BRAIN sometime) but certainly one of the most lovable. Aliens use the bodies of the dead to become their murdering, zombie slaves.

### DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 62 (#DI-62)\*

**BLACK SABBATH** (1963) Boris Karloff, Mark Damon, Michelle Mercier, Jacqueline Perreux. A Mario Bava masterpiece! Karloff hosts and stars in this superb trilogy of horror stories, all of which are unforgettable. 'The Drop of Water' concerns a nurse who steals a ring off a dead spiritualist, only to have the corpse seek revenge. 'The Telephone' features a prostitute who's terrorized by phone calls from a dead client. The final and best is, 'The Wurdalak' featuring Karloff as a vampire who preys upon the blood of his loved ones. AIP scored big with this one.

**FIRST SPACESHIP ON VENUS** (1963) Gunther Simon, Kurt Rackelmann, Yoko Tani. An international expedition is launched to the planet Venus. There they find the planet and its former inhabitants completely destroyed by atomic war. Crew faces many perils including a blob-like monster. Some fine special effects (for its time) are featured in this enjoyable sci-fi thriller.



Plus



### DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 63 (#DI-63)\*



**THE VAMPIRE** (1957) German Roties, Abel Salazar. The grand-daddy of Mexican vampire films. An evil Count threatens to put the bite on a beautiful young girl. Much inspired by the earlier Universal horror classics, with some nice atmosphere and good looking sets—in spite of the film's low budget rappings.

**CURSE OF THE DOLL PEOPLE** (1960) Ramon Gay, Nora Veyan. A voodoo curse is put on a group of tourists who steal a Haitian devil doll. A lot of ghoulish little critters are roaming the countryside in what is one of the better K. Gordon Murray Mexican horrors. Recently remastered.



## DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 64 (#DI-64)\*

**THE SINISTER URGE** (1960) Kenne Duncan, James Moore, Jean Fontaine, Carl Anthony, Dino Fantini, Conrad Brooks. Ed Wood's campy expose of the smut picture racket. Like all of Ed's previous films, it reeks of his usual warped, twisted, inept genius. Police try to track down a sex killer and put an end to the smut picture business that inspired his hideous crime. Ed, himself appears in a light scene. From 35mm.

**THE VIOLENT YEARS** (1955) Jean Moorhead, Barbara Weeks, Timothy Farrell, I. Stanford Jolley. Ed Wood wrote this wildly entertaining screenplay about a gang of young girls that hold up gas stations and vandalize schools. The "rape" scene involving the gang girls and a young male captive is hilarious. Brought out of mothballs by Headliner Productions to fill the lower berth on a double bill with **SINISTER URGE**. From a stunning 35mm print.



## DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 65 (#DI-65)\*

**WEREWOLF IN A GIRLS' DORMITORY** (1963) Barbara Lass, Carl Scheil, Curt Lowens. A creepy, gaudy tale about a snarling werewolf on the prowl at a girls' reform school. Suspicion falls upon a new teacher after a horrible, animal-like slaying takes place. Is he really the murdering beast? It played with **MAD EXECUTIONERS** only as a spot double feature; its regular companion film was **CORRIDORS OF BLOOD**. From a gorgeous 35mm print.

**THE MAD EXECUTIONERS** (1963) Wolfgang Preis, Chris Howland, Maria Perschy. A mad scientist decapitates his victims and tries to keep their heads alive. Meanwhile, a group of strange vigilantes are capturing and murdering "criminals" without benefit of public trial. Is there a connection? Scotland Yard investigates. Released by Paramount. Partially letter-boxed in the scope format.



## DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 66 (#DI-66)\*



**THE SADIST** (1963) Arch Hall, Jr., Helen Hovey, Richard Alden, Marilyn Manning. The greatest low-budget, psycho-horror movie ever made, period, bar none. Three people driving into L.A. for a Dodgers game have car trouble and pull into an old wrecking yard where they're held at bay by a bloodthirsty psycho and his crazy girlfriend. They put their captives through pure hell in this thriller that was easily 10 years ahead of its time. A classic you will never forget. From 35mm.

**PSYCHOMANIA** (1963 aka **VIOLENT MIDNIGHT**) Lee Philips, James Farentino, Dick Van Patten. Axe murders galore are featured in this terrific little psycho-horror film about a mad killer loose in a small New England town. Who is the mad killer? An impressive cast that went on to great personal successes a few years later. From the man who gave you **HORROR OF PARTY BEACH**.

## DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 67 (#DI-67)

**LADY FRANKENSTEIN** (1972) Joseph Cotten, Sarah Bay, Mickey Hargitay. Baron Frankenstein's daughter creates a monster of her own to satisfy her bizarre sexual desires! Screaming naked ladies and rampaging monsters are featured in this rousing color horror shocker shot in Europe. Beautiful color. Definitely rated "R."

**BEAST OF THE YELLOW NIGHT** (1971) John Ashley, Mary Wilcox. A wacked out disciple of the Devil is able to absorb evil from the souls of the people he murders. He eventually turns into a horrible monster and is hunted down by the local police. Roger Corman was executive producer for this unusual Philippine shocker. Color. From 35mm.

## DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 68 (#DI-68)\*



**TERROR IS A MAN** (1959) Francis Lederer, Richard Derr, Greta Thyssen. An excellent sci-fi/horror opus shot by an all English speaking cast in the Philippines. A mad scientist transforms a panther into a man-like creature that escapes and goes on a rampage. Featuring an outstanding music score! Dozens of horror/sci-fi films have been shot in the Philippines, this is undoubtedly the best.

**FACE OF TERROR** (1959) Lisa Gaye, Fernando Rey, Gerard Tichy. A schlocky but fun mixture of horror and science fiction. Rey plays a scientist who develops a serum that can eradicate scar tissue. He transforms a young girl's horribly disfigured face into a thing of beauty again. Unknown to him, she's an escaped lunatic from a local asylum. After her treatment, she escapes. Later on, her face starts to look rather odd. From 35mm.

## DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 69 (#DI-69)\*

**MAN WHO LIVED AGAIN** (1936, aka **DR. MANIAC**) Boris Karloff, Anna Lee, John Loder. Boris lets it all hang out as he plays the mad Dr. Laurie, who invents a fantastic machine that will transfer personalities from one body to another. Great lab scenes and a terrific climax. One of the classic horror films of the 1930s. Never seen it? You're missing one helluva movie. Re-released on the Texas drive-in circuit in the 1950s as **DR. MANIAC**.

**THE HUMAN MONSTER** (1939 aka **THE DARK EYES OF LONDON**) Bela Lugosi, Hugh Williams, Greta Gynt. One of the best shockers of the 30s. Bela gleefully murders people and then throws them out his window onto the mud flats of the Thames. The setting is an eerie home for the blind. A hair-raising final sequence that still packs a jolt. Also widely re-released during the 1950s and 1960s. A dusk-to-dawn staple at many drive-ins.



## DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 70 (#DI-70)

**DR. JEKYLL VS THE WEREWOLF** (1971) Paul Naschy, Jack Taylor. A man afflicted with lycanthropy becomes tired of turning into a snarling werewolf. He seeks out the grandson of the infamous Dr. Jekyll in the hope of finding a cure. Better than usual Naschy effort. A beautiful transfer from a beautiful print.

**IT HAPPENED AT NIGHTMARE INN** (1972 aka **NIGHTMARE HOTEL**) Judy Geeson, Victor Alcazar. A grisly film in which murder victims are hidden in large container of cooking wine. This chilling, Spanish horror film was upgraded a couple of years ago from a nice 16mm original print which contains approximately seven minutes more footage than our previous master.

## DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 71 (#DI-71)\*

**MONSTER FROM GREEN HELL** (1957) Jim Davis, Barbara Turner. Radiation in a certain region of Africa causes ordinary wasps to mutate into giant monsters that run amok, killing many of the local citizens. A scientific research expedition sets out to investigate. Good old '50s sci-fi schlock.

**HALF HUMAN** (1955) John Carradine, Morris Ankrum. A weird tale about a strange race of Japanese abominable snowmen and the attempts by man to capture and exploit them. American scientists Carradine and Ankrum explain what's going on. Some great outdoor monster shots. From 35mm.

## DOUBLE FEATURE NO. 72 (#DI-72)\*

**HANDS OF ORLAC** (1960) Mel Ferrer, Christopher Lee, Donald Wolfelt, Dany Carrel. A well done remake of **MAD LOVE** with Ferrer as the pianist with the transplanted criminal hands and Lee as the sleazy magician who blackmails him. Carrel has a body that won't quit. A slickly done British horror thriller you won't forget soon.

**THE TELL-TALE HEART** (1960) Lawrence Payne, Dermot Walsh. A very unusual and very entertaining adaptation of the classic Poe story. A shy loner discovers the girl he loves in the arms of his best friend. Murder and horror follow in dramatic fashion. Probably the best filmed version of this famous story.



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KNB group is just plain bargain basement. All in all, this one isn't really worth the bother unless you are a Bruce-on-a-stick reader, or it's in the \$1.00 rental bin.

Reviewed by Ron Ford

## Fright

(1957, Allied Artists. With Erick Fleming, Nancy Malone, Frank Marth)

Sparked by public interest in the Bridey Murphy controversy, producer-director W. Lee Wilder jumped on the reincarnation bandwagon with *Fright* (a.k.a. *Spell of the Hypnotist*, 1957), a tepid drama. The made-in-New York feature gave Eric Fleming top billing as Park Avenue psychiatrist James Hamilton, who prevents mad-dog killer Frank Marth from jumping off the Queensboro Bridge by paralyzing him through the power of suggestion. As Marth is remanded to police custody, onlooker Nancy Malone feels the effects of Fleming's words as well and seeks him out for psychiatric treatment. On his couch, the hypnotized girl appears to recall a previous existence in which she was the teenage lover (Maria Vetsera) of Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria, with whom she committed suicide at Mayerling in 1889. Fleming investigates and learns that it's a case of split personality, not reincarnation. His remedy is to hypnotize the incarcerated Marth into believing that he's the reincarnated "Rudy," Malone (in her "other" personality) and Marth harmlessly act out the suicide, and Malone is freed of the influence of her other half.

Riding the crest of the short-lived fad, the 78-minute release was a tedious soap opera and a far cry from the lurid ad lines used to publicize it ("A Woman Turned To Demon By The 'Spell of the Hypnotist'"). New York locations give it a unique flavor and Fleming and Malone "act with some finesse, fortunately" (*The Motion Picture Exhibitor*), but the story itself is ludicrous and long-in-the-telling. (For instance, there's

no explanation for having a hypnotized Marth stand in as the Crown Prince when Fleming could have safely and sanely hired an actor to play out the "suicide" opposite Malone.) The occasional use of "funny" music undercuts the filmmakers' intentions, whatever they were; also good for laughs are Malone's references to "Rudy's valet," which sounds too much like "Rudy Vallee" for Wilder and company not to have noticed.

About the best thing that can be said about this mystifying mess is that it would have been an ideal co-feature for Wilder's equally aberrant *The Man Without a Body* (also 1957).

Reviewed by Tom Weaver

## The Magic Serpent

*The Magic Serpent* (1966), a Toei Company Ltd. production featuring several different giant monsters, is similar to *Majin—Monster of Terror* (1966), *The Return of the Giant Majin* (1966) and *Majin Strikes Again* (1966) in that it is set in Japan's Tokugawa Period (1600-1868). However, it is different from the three movies, all of which feature a giant samurai made of stone, in that it is much more of a fantasy film.

During a scene in which prince Ikazuchimaru (Hiroki Matsutaka) first confronts Yukidaijo (Bin Amatsu), the person who seizes power by murdering Ikazuchimaru's parents, the prince conjures up the spirits of his dead parents. When they appear, the film immediately changes from color into black and white. This has a chilling effect, but if the change had gradually been introduced, the effect would have been much greater.

The special effects generally aren't very convincing. It is all too obvious that the giant frog and the dragon, which spews water instead of fire, are in reality people wearing costumes, the models used to portray the giant spider and the giant eagle look like

models and the pyrotechnics seem more like fireworks than explosions.

Abrupt editing is occasionally used to try to hide the shortcomings of the special effects, but it achieves the opposite effect because it causes one's attention to linger. This is especially true of the shot in which the evil wizard Orochimaru (Ryutaro Otomo) transmutes from a snake into his natural state.

During a scene in which several ninjas attack Ikazuchimaru, one of the ninjas succeeds in beheading the prince with a boomerang. However, this does not kill him. Instead, Ikazuchimaru's head rests on a log and laughs while his body manages to subdue the ninja. The matte work featured in this sequence, and in the one in which Ikazuchimaru confronts Yukidaijo from atop the giant frog, is fairly good.

The scene leaves a great deal to be desired. It is much too sparse and much too modern. Especially inappropriate is the music heard while a number of women dance for Yukidaijo. The women dance, not to some traditional Japanese melody, but instead to a piece similar to a cha-cha.

The American version of *The Magic Serpent* is very similar to the original Japanese one, but a few changes were made. The roar of the dragon was replaced with Godzilla's, Rodan's was substituted for the frog's and the cry of the eagle was discarded in favor of Mothra's.

*The Magic Serpent* was distributed directly to American television stations by American International Television, Inc. in 1968. The film has yet to be released on home video in the United States.

Reviewed by David Milner



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aftermath (82) Ted V. Mikels directs S. Barnett</li> <li>Alvin Karpis (80) Lynn Holly Johnson</li> <li>And God Said to Cain (67/Ital.) K. Kinski Eurowestern</li> <li>Arabian Nights (74/Ital.-Eng. sub/Lib) Pasolini dir.</li> <li>Biggles (85/UK) Peter Cushing's last film role</li> <li>Bits and Pieces (77) Suzanne Smith, S.E. Zymont</li> <li>Bloodrage (79) Lawrence Tierney, Ian Scott</li> <li>Blood Salts (72) Dyane (Lisa) Thorne, A. Geary</li> <li>Bloodstallers (76) Kenny Miller, Celia Ann Cole</li> <li>Blood Splash (88) Baird Stafford, Tom Savini FX</li> <li>Blue Blood (73/UK) Oliver Reed, Fiona Lewis</li> <li>Blue Monkey (88) Steve Railsback, John Vernon</li> <li>Body Talk (81/X) Angelique Pettyjohn, Kay Parker</li> <li>Brain Dead (92) Uncut alt. version of 'Dead Alive'</li> <li>Cain's Cutthroats (71) Carradine, Al Adamson dir.</li> <li>Canterbury Tales (71/Ital./Lib.) P. Pasolini dir.</li> <li>Captive (87) Oliver Reed, Irina Brook in bondage</li> <li>The Cat and the Canary (77) Carol Lynley, O. Hussey</li> <li>Cover Girl Models (75) Pat Anderson, L. Bloom</li> <li>Dagger Eyes (80) Jennifer Miller, Celia Ann Cole</li> <li>Daughters of Satan (72/Filipino) Tom Selleck</li> <li>The Day of the Cobra (84/Ital.) F. Nero, Svbi Danning</li> <li>Decameron (70/Ital.-Eng. sub/Lib.) P. Pasolini dir.</li> <li>Death Sport (78) David Carradine, Claudia Jennings</li> <li>The Devil Within Her (75/UK) Pleasance Munro</li> <li>Don't Go in the Woods (81) Nick McClelland</li> <li>Don't Mess With My Sister! (85) Mier Zarchi dir.</li> <li>Double Exposure (82) Michael Callan, J. Pette</li> <li>Emanuelle in Bangkok (76/Italian) Laura Gemser</li> <li>Escape From Cellblock 3 (78) Carolyn Judd</li> <li>Evil Town (87) James Keach, Dean Jagger</li> <li>The Fantast (89) Timothy Bottoms, Moira Harris</li> <li>Fear No Evil (81) Stefan Armgrin, Eliz. Hoffman</li> <li>The Female Bunch (69) R. Tamblin, Al Adamson dir.</li> <li>The Final Programme (73/UK/S. Douglas, P. Magee</li> <li>Five Bloody Graves (70) Carradine, Al Adamson dir.</li> <li>Forever Evil (87) Red Mitchell, Freeman Williams</li> <li>The Freeway Menace (88) Loren Wright</li> <li>Frenchman's Farm (87/Australian) Tracey Tanish</li> <li>Future-Kill (85) Edwin Neal, Marilyn Burns</li> <li>Galaxina (80) Dorothy Stratten, Stephen Macht</li> <li>Girl in Gold Boots (69) Ted V. Mikels directs</li> <li>Girls Nite Out (83) Hal Holbrook, Rutanya Alda</li> <li>Girls on the Road (75) Kathleen Cody, Dianne Hull</li> <li>God Told Me To (76) Deborah Raffin, Sandy Dennis</li> <li>Gold of the Amazon Women (78/Unrated) A. Ekberg</li> <li>Gorath (64/Jap.-Eng. dubbed/Toho) I. Honda dir.</li> <li>Grey Matter (73) James Best, Barbara Burgess</li> <li>Hallucination (67) George Montgomery, I.S.D.</li> <li>The House of the Dead (80) Erickson, Bernard Fox</li> <li>Hundra (85/Ital.) Laurence Landon, Marissa Cappel</li> <li>Hunters of the Golden Cobra (82/Ital.) A. Margheri dir.</li> <li>Hustler Squad (76) Ted V. Mikels directs</li> <li>Insanity (82) Terence Stamp, Corinne Clery</li> <li>Invaders of the Lost World (74) Laura Gemser</li> <li>IT Lives Again (78) John P. Ryan, Kathleen Lord</li> <li>Joy Ride to Nowhere (78) Leslie Ackerman</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Julia (74) Sylvia Kristel, Jean-Claude Bouillon</li> <li>King of Jeog Island (78/Spanish) Brad Harris</li> <li>Kronos (57) Jeff Morrow, Barbara Lawrence</li> <li>La Bete (79/X Euro version) aka "The Beast"</li> <li>Lady Stay Dead (83/Australian) Psycho on the loose!</li> <li>The Last Porno Flick (74/M. Pataki, Colleen Camp</li> <li>The Last Slumber Party (87) Jan Jensen</li> <li>The Majorettes (87) Kevin Kindan, John Russo dir.</li> <li>Mannix (78) Oliver Reed, Deborah Raffin</li> <li>The Manilow (78) Strassberg, Stevens, Curtis</li> <li>Mary, Mary, Bloody Mary (76) Christina Ferrare</li> <li>Mausoleum (83) Bobbie Breese, LaWanda Page</li> <li>Movie House Massacre (78) Mary Woronov</li> <li>Ms. Magnificent (77/X) Super Desiree Cousteau!</li> <li>My Father's Wife (79/Italian) Carol Baker</li> <li>Naked Vengeance (85/Italian) Deborah Traneli</li> <li>Natas: The Reflection (83) Randy Mukley, Satan!</li> <li>Nightkill (80) Jaclyn Smith, James Franciscus</li> <li>Nurse Sheen (78) Jill Jacobsen, Al Adamson dir.</li> <li>One Night Stand Before Death (88) Based on 'One</li> <li>One Night Stand (77/Canadian) Chappelle Jaffe</li> <li>Panic (83/Italian) David Warbeck, Janet Agren</li> <li>Pretty Peaches (77/X) Desiree Cousteau's classic</li> <li>Patrick (78/Aust.) Robt. Helpmann, S. Penhaligon</li> <li>Poor White Trash (57) Peter Graves, Lisa Milan</li> <li>Red Heat (85) Linda Blair, Sylvia Kristel, Sue Kie</li> <li>La Senora Muerte (68/Mexican) John Carradine</li> <li>The Severed Arm (73) Deborah Walley</li> <li>Sex and Zen (93/Chin.-Eng. sub/Lib.) X) Uncut</li> <li>Scalpel (76) Robert Lansing, Judith Chapman</li> <li>She (83) Sandahl Bergman, Harrison Muller</li> <li>Sister Emanuelle (81/Italian) Laura Gemser</li> <li>Silthuis (78) Alan Blanchard, Judy Motulsky</li> <li>Snuff (76) Alan Schackleton's banned cult nasty</li> <li>Spare Parts (85) Judith Speidel, Wolf Roth</li> <li>Spatter: Architects of Fear (86) Gore FX secrets</li> <li>Stage Fright (83/Australian) Jenny Neumann</li> <li>Stage Fright (87/Italian) Barbara Cupisti</li> <li>Starline Motel (75) Ursula Andress, Barbara Bach</li> <li>The Stay Awake (87) Shirley Jane Harris</li> <li>The Stepford Wives (75) K. Ross, Paula Prentiss</li> <li>The Student Nurses (70) Karen Carlson, B. Leigh</li> <li>The Student Teachers (73) Roger Corman produces</li> <li>Student Union (79/Ital.) Victoria Thornycroft, Euro-T&amp;A</li> <li>Suicide Cult (77) Bob Byrd, Monica Tokell</li> <li>Swamp of the Lost Monsters (65/Mexican)</li> <li>Teenage Devil Dolls (53) Barbara Marks</li> <li>3 Nuts in Search of a Bolt (64) Mamie Van Doren nude!</li> <li>Trapped (90) Kathleen Quinlan, Bruce Abbott</li> <li>Ultimate Warrior (75) Yui Brynner, K. Clause dir.</li> <li>Vampire (79/TVM) Richard Lynch, Jason Miller</li> <li>The Van (77) Stuart Getz, Deborah White</li> <li>Van the Unbelievable (58/Toho) I. Honda dir.</li> <li>The Viking Women (58) Abby Dalton, Corman dir.</li> <li>The Vultures (67/UK), Akim Tamiroff</li> <li>Werewolves on Wheels (71) Stephen Oliver</li> <li>The Yum-Yum Girls (78) J. Landers, Tanya Roberts</li> </ul> |
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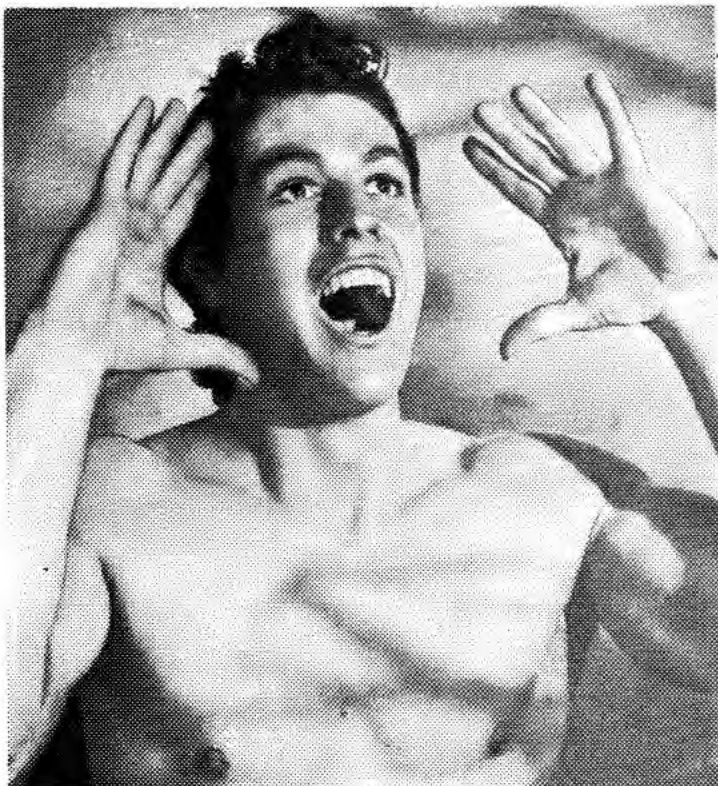
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# Gordon Scott Speaks!

## by Stephen Flaccasser

While working as a lifeguard at the Sierra Hotel in Las Vegas, Gordon Scott was discovered by a Hollywood talent agent and was soon cast as the eleventh screen Tarzan in Sol Lesser's production of *Tarzan's Hidden Jungle* (1955). Gordon was 27 years old at the time. He continued with the character through 1960 in *Tarzan's Last Safari*, *Tarzan's Fight For Life*, *Tarzan's Greatest Adventure*, and *Tarzan The Magnificent*. Also, three proposed Tarzan television episodes which Sol Lesser was unable to sell to the networks were edited together to become the feature film, *Tarzan And The Trappers*.

Needing a change of pace, Scott traveled to Italy and eventually made his home there, appearing in over 40 films. He starred with Steve Reeves in *Duel Of The Titans* and with Joseph Cotten in a Spaghetti Western called *The Trampers*. In January of 1995 Gordon Scott reflected on his career for the readers of *Cult Movies Magazine*.

**Cult Movies:** Your last Tarzan film was *Tarzan The Magnificent* which co-starred Jack Mahoney, who became the next Tarzan when you stepped down. Did you get to know Mahoney very well?

Gordon Scott: Oh, I knew him very well — he was great to work with! Our fight scenes could be done real fast; he knew what he was doing, since he was an ex-stuntman. And I knew what I was doing, so the action scenes were easy to choreograph.

CM: And you worked with John Carradine...

GS: Yes, he was in that same film. He would tell tales and was fun to work with as an actor. Sometimes he'd climb the walls, but if you held him down just a bit he was a marvelous performer.

CM: Of course, he got typed as a villain and a vampire...

GS: That's true. But his early stuff, like *Grapes Of Wrath* was all first class. He did a lot of wild stuff because he just loved to act, so he'd do anything, anytime, anywhere.

CM: After doing films in Hollywood, you worked in Italy and Africa...

GS: I worked everywhere! We also shot in Germany, Spain, and Egypt. I worked in Beirut, which was a beautiful city at one time. We flew up there from Cairo to work on a film. We shot for a weekend and it was something! Beirut used to be so beautiful — the Paris of the Mid-East. A real romantic place. Then after seeing all the shelling and bombing that went on there, it was just heart-breaking.

CM: Did you also work in China? *Samson And The Seven Miracles Of The World* is said to have location footage from China.

GS: No, we had a great art director. That was a good looking film, and I got to work with a beautiful Chinese actress. She was marvelous. But those exteriors were shot around the caves outside Rome, and we just had a good art director who knew what to do.

CM: Your first Tarzan films were made for Sol Lesser, then the whole series got sold to Sy Weintraub. Did conditions change with the new producers?

GS: Oh, yeah. Working with Sol Lesser it was almost like a family operation, and the films had a kind of blase feel to them. With Weintraub there was a lot more action, and they were the first ones shot in color which helped them make more money worldwide. The earlier ones made money too, but not like these new ones. And we shot on location in Africa. They dropped the characters of Jane and Boy after the first one. I think they continued to use the chimp once or twice.

CM: Which did you prefer — doing the Tarzan films here in Hollywood or going to Italy to do the Sword and Sandal films? Did the Hercules things seem like a step down?

GS: Going to Italy was a nice change. After you've done a certain character such as Tarzan for so long, it can get a little stale. They wanted me to re-sign up for another seven years as Tarzan, but I was over there in Italy doing well so I turned that down.

CM: And you ended up staying over there for around 10 years?

GS: Yes. While I was over there, they loaned me

out to Dino DeLaurentis for a film. And while I was working on that the option ran out on my first seven years. And Weintraub wired me at the Metro Hotel in Yugoslavia saying they wanted to sign me up for another seven years. I said no, that I thought it was time for me to go on to other things. And I ended up making a total of 42 films over there. They really grind them out in Europe and I was working every damned day! But it was a lot of fun. Of those films there were 15 or 20 that were really pretty good. At least I thought they were pretty good. In some cases it was just a job.

CM: Was the language barrier ever a problem?

GS: No, because they dubbed a lot over there. And there are a lot of people in the business who could make plenty of money just doing dubbing work in films if they were bilingual.

CM: The Sword & Sandal epics dovetailed with the so-called Spaghetti Westerns in the mid-'60s. You chose not to do too many of those.

GS: I did a few of them right at the start of that cycle. I worked with Joseph Cotten in *The Trampers*, then I did another one called *Buffalo Bill, Man Of The West*. I've got to say, Joseph Cotten was great to work with. A true Southern gentleman who could perform under any kind of conditions. And, like Carradine, he was another great storyteller. He talked about his days in the Mercury Theatre with Orson Welles, Agnes Moorehead and John Houseman. A very fine gentleman.

But after those two Westerns, I came back to the States to see about a series that was going. I also had some personal things to take care of with my son, and so forth. So I came back home to the United States and never went back. In some ways I miss being in Europe. My base of operations was Rome, and it was great since there were many American actors, British actors — it was a real hub of activity.

CM: I didn't know exactly how that worked. I thought you guys flew to Italy for one or two films, then would come back here...

GS: I did that twice! Then the films started coming up so rapidly I decided to stay over there. And ended up living there for 10 years.

CM: What do you think of today's action films?

GS: Some of them are quite good. There've been so many technological advances, with computer animation and all. But sometimes there's too much violence without any purpose. Hollywood releases a lot of junk film. The kind of films I still prefer are the old horror films.

CM: Great. So do we!!!



GS: I really like watching Boris Karloff. Now there was a mild mannered man in real life who could do such scary work. *Tower Of London* with Karloff and Rathbone, was one of the greatest films Karloff ever made. I loved that one, and also *Bride Of Frankenstein*. There was a great paradox in all that because Boris was such a mild and gracious person, and he played these horrible characters and did so well at it. He's one actor I never did get to meet, but I sure wish I could have.

CM: You had monsters in a few of your films.

GS: Oh yeah, like *Goliath And The Vampires*. The final results on that weren't too bad. It could have turned out better, but couldn't they all.

CM: And you know Steve Reeves, the other great hero of the epic films.

GS: Yes, Steve and I are still good friends. I've known him since 1947, and we used to work out together for a few years. Then he got the part of Hercules. It was kind of funny — he was working at Burt Goodrich's gym as an instructor, and I was working out there. Steve had to grow a beard just to make the screen test for the film, and all the gym instructors had to be clean shaven. Steve said, "Don't tell them I'm doing this or they'll fire me!" He wanted to keep his job at the gym a little while longer, since he wasn't sure he'd get the part in the film or not. But as it ended up, he got the part and everything worked out pretty good. And Steve Reeves made film history around the world. He is *the* Hercules. It's like, for me, Sean Connery is James Bond; the other actors were okay, but Connery was the best. And Reeves was a great Hercules. I've worked on-screen with him and he's one of the great ones.

CM: Have you got any new film projects coming up?

GS: There's a film I'll be doing in Canada in August that's based on a true story about a murder indictment. They convicted this woman on circumstantial evidence, and she wanted a new trial. She hired an investigator who did clear her of all

charges after four years of intense detection work. And I play the investigator. This is obviously a contemporary film; there won't be any knives or arrows in it. It's a mystery with a Hitchcock-style ending to it.

CM: One last question we always ask people in show business when we do these interviews...

GS: Yeah, I got laid a lot.

CM: I'll bet you did — but that's not the question! Was there any memorable advice you got from anybody during your career? Good advice, or bad advice...?

GS: Advice? Don't get too close to the chimp because they bite a lot.

CM: Did you get bitten?

GS: No, I didn't, but Mike Henry did when he was playing Tarzan. It was a pretty serious injury; he almost died from it.

CM: As far as advice — there are sometimes well-meaning friends or relatives who tell a performer to quit wasting their time in show business...

GS: Yeah, I know what you mean. Well, I've always been my own man about decisions like that. Nobody else can take responsibility for a person. If I've got anybody to blame for things I've done it's me.

CM: A great philosophy! Thanks for the interview Gordon.

GS: Anytime, pal! ■

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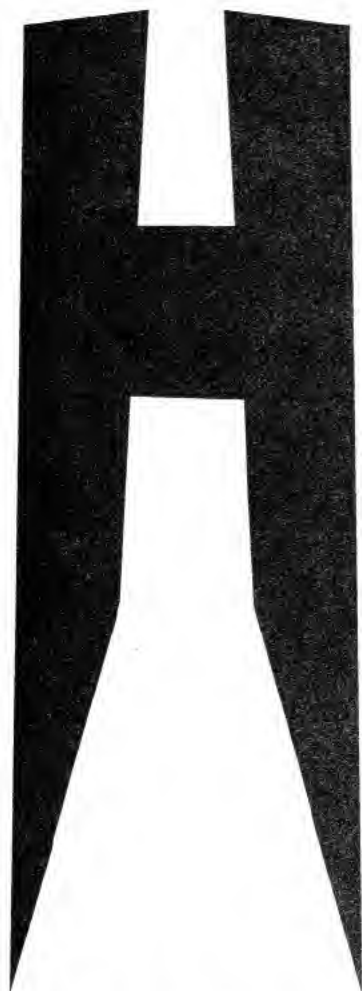
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Bela Lugosi menaces Luana Walters in *The Corpse Vanishes* (1942).

# THE BRITISH "BAN" ON HORROR FILMS OF 1937

by Frank J. Dello Stritto

May, 1934, Hollywood — the premiere of *The Black Cat*, Universal's only horror film of 1934 and its first teaming of Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi:—

*"Those who died were fortunate. I was taken prisoner to Kurgaal. Kurgaal! Where the soul is killed slowly! Fifteen years I've rotted in the darkness. Waiting — not to kill you, but to kill your soul, slowly." Vitus Werdegast returns from a hellish prisoner of war camp to find his wife and daughter and to take revenge on Hjalmar Poelzig. Poelzig, a high priest of Satanism, had betrayed Werdegast's devotion to the Russians and stolen his family. At Poelzig mansion Werdegast sees his wife, long dead and entombed in glass in a museum of Poelzig's human sacrifices. Only when Werdegast rescues the next victim from Poelzig's altar does he learn that his daughter is Madame Poelzig. But she too is now dead, murdered only hours before by her husband. Werdegast overcomes Poelzig, straps him to his own embalming rack and strips the skin from his face with a scalpel. Dying from a gunshot wound, Werdegast ignites the dynamite which undermines the mansion. He, Poelzig and the "whole rotten cult" of devil worshippers perish.*

1934, London, Caxton Hall — It's not a cross

between Carfax Abbey and Baskerville Hall, but in horror film history Caxton Hall may be almost as important. In 1934, a diverse collection of civic and church groups met in Caxton Hall to discuss a large agenda of issues. Among the topics was film censorship.

In practice, film censorship in Britain rivalled that of the United States in complexity. The British Board of Film Censors rated all films playing in Britain. Throughout the country local county councils presided over their theaters and applied the BBFC's ratings according to their own preferences. Theater owners retained varying degrees of freedom, for film censorship was officially, though rarely in practice, a voluntary system.

Undermining the entire censorship system was the business of booking films and running theaters. Since a majority of films on British screens came from America, bookings tended to be made well in advance of the BBFC's ratings. Exhibitors booking double-bills had no effective means of ensuring that both films had the same rating. The result was often a loosely enforced, ill-defined, decentralized system.

The BBFC could ban films altogether (which it

typically did for 10 to 20 films a year), remove objectionable scenes or slap the films with a "A" rating ("Adult"; persons under 16 must be accompanied by an adult). In 1932, for example, the BBFC rated 279 films "U" ("Universal," no restrictions on attendance), 360 "A" and banned 22. In the early 1930s the BBFC could also classify any film "likely to frighten or horrify children under 16" as "Horrific." "Horrific" was a classification, not a rating, requiring only that exhibitors post a notice stating "This Film Is Unsuitable For Children" at every showing of the movie. Most districts required no other restrictions. Some counties banned persons under 16 from "H" films. That ban was soon moot, since the BBFC, never comfortable with "H," quietly dropped it from the system sometime before 1935.

Generally, the BBFC favored encouraging "suitable" films over punishing "unsuitable" ones, and much preferred working with film producers over dictating the rules. As indicated in many public statements and in confrontations with its critics, the BBFC respected moviegoers' rights to choose. By modern standards, the BBFC of the early 1930s might be regarded as rather enlightened. The



groups meeting in Caxton Hall largely saw the BBFC as a permissive, hands-off body, a bit too cozy to the industry which it oversaw. The BBFC derived all its funds from the fees charged to distributors for rating films, and critics of the BBFC saw it as in effect funded by the film industry. Many groups sought tighter controls on films, by an "independent" (that is, publicly-funded) censor.

Throughout the early 1930s the BBFC fought constant pressure to toughen its policy of what reached British movie screens. "Horrific" would become the chief battleground for the standoff. At the meeting in Caxton Hall — attended by the National Women's Council, the London Public Morality Council, the Mother's Union, the National Union of Women Teachers, among others — a resolution was passed to adopt an "H" rating of films. For such films, no one under 16 could be admitted. Thus, in Caxton Hall in 1934, began a clash of "freedom" versus "decency" and a turf war for control of the British film market. To the extent the Empire looked to Britain for leadership — to the extent American and other reformers could point to Britain as an example — the winner could have a global impact on film distribution.

Hollywood knew well the importance of Britain as a market. Its population in 1934 was almost 45 million — 20 million of which on average attended at the cinema every week. Thus, Britain was far larger than in any single U.S. state or metropolitan area and, when unified, had significant clout.

Viewed from today's perspective, the British reformers of the 1930s, urging censorship of "horrific" films, are easily portrayed as quaint and narrow-minded. Actually, they faced problems quite similar to those of 1995. A new technology (sound films) had not only revolutionized popular entertainment, but made the system for controlling it obsolete. Not coincidentally did the United States and Britain overhaul their censorship systems at approximately the same time. But American theaters were largely showing American films. The British were coping with a foreign invasion — from America. With the coming of sound films, America's domination of British screens increased notably. By 1934, 70% of the films shown in Britain came from the United States.

In the USA, the new censorship targeted "sex" and to a lesser degree "violence," and the Production Code of the Motion Picture Producers & Distributors of America became the censors' weapon. Originally published in 1930, the rejuvenated Code of 1934 definitely affected what reached the screen. While some film genres, most notably gangster films, were markedly influenced by the Code, horror films were not. Horror films of 1931-1933 contain their share of explicit sex or violence, but these films dwell mainly in the shadows of human and inhuman desires. The Code defined how far they could go, how far from the shadows they dared venture.

In its fight to maintain control the BBFC received no help from Hollywood. Just as "H" became the battleground, horror films revived and took a turn not into darkness, but into light. Under the new Code, the genre obeyed all the rules but still clearly conveyed the psychosexual themes at the core of all classic horror. Through 1935, Universal's horror films would explore the darkest of human passions. With the unrelenting pressure from the reformers and the thinly veiled messages on the screen, the BBFC eventually conceded the fight to its critics. The consequences on film history were momentous, and American horror films never really recovered.

—May 1935: the premiere of *Bride of Frankenstein*, Universal's sequel to *Frankenstein*:



Paulette Goddard cringes in fear in *The Cat And The Canary* (1938).

"I was foretold of this! I was told to beware my wedding night!" screams Henry Frankenstein's betrothed Elizabeth as she suffers horrifying visions of their future. Dr. Pretorius arrives and proposes that together he and Frankenstein create "a woman, a mate" for Frankenstein's first creation. The two unnatural beings will then create a new race of men. Only moments before, with Elizabeth, Frankenstein had shared his secret desire to do exactly that. But Frankenstein refuses.

Undaunted, Pretorius begins the project. He breaks into a large crypt to steal the remains of a girl with which to build his woman. From the shadows emerges the Monster, hiding from his pursuers. In his ponderous, child-like voice, the Monster asks "You make man, like me?" "No, woman — friend for you." The Monster gently cradles her skull in his hands. "Woman... Friend... (the scene switches to an extreme close-up, Karloff is looking directly into the camera)... Wife." To persuade Frankenstein, Pretorius and the Monster kidnap Elizabeth. Pretorius assures Frankenstein that nothing will happen to her, "Nothing that is, except what He demands." The Bride is constructed and brought to life. As the lightning surges into her body, the Monster becomes so excited he kills one of the assistants. But the Bride is terrified of the Monster, and jerks free from his gentle, loving touch. "She hate me, like others." As Frankenstein and Elizabeth flee, the Monster pulls the lever which destroys Pretorius, his Bride, himself and the laboratory where both were created.

Silent films, though quickly giving way to sound, were still commonly distributed throughout Britain. In 1930 the BBFC rated 310 silent films, compared to 540 sound films. The self-regulating system of film censorship strained to accommodate the new era. In January 1931, Edward Shortt, Chief of the BBFC issued the following statement:

"In our last reports attention has been drawn to the tendency to produce incidents of prolonged and gross brutality and sordid themes, which it must be admitted are unwholesome and repugnant to large sections of the audiences of this country. Such films have required drastic eliminations and modifications before they could receive the Board's certification.

"Of late it has been noticed with regret that films are being produced in which the develop-

ment of the theme necessitates a continuous succession of grossly brutal and sordid scenes, accompanied in the case of auditory films with sounds that accentuate the situation and nauseate the listener. No modification, however drastic, can render such films suitable for public exhibition. In consequence, the Board takes the opportunity of notifying the trade that in future no film will receive the Board's certificate in which the theme, without any redeeming characteristic, depends upon the intense brutality or unrelieved sordidness of the scenes depicted."

Though Shortt claimed these sordid films "are unwholesome and repugnant to large sections of the audiences of this country," the BBFC admitted that banned films "made a fortune." Under the voluntary system, in some parts of the country, if an exhibitor could obtain a print of a banned film, he could show it (though, apparently, few ever did). Thus the BBFC had a firm policy of not naming the films it banned. In 1930, the BBFC banned 12 films. Its annual report does not name these films, but does list the bases for the rulings: "blackmail associated with immorality; cruelty to animals; reference to illegal operations and birth control; the Salvation Army shown in an unfavorable light; companionate marriage; unrelievedly sordid themes; stories in which the criminal element is predominant; themes portraying the hereafter; man and woman in bed together; and brutal fighting."

Shortt's statement drew universal praise from the watchdog groups, but they continued to pressure him. He felt compelled to answer them, with classic British reserve:

"A certain amount of criticism, it is stated, has had to be met, which in a large measure emanated from those who were either unacquainted with the facts or possessed an imperfect knowledge of the fundamental principles upon which the Board is established."

Those principles, as laid out in the Cinematograph Act of 1909 and revised and updated in 1923 and 1929, defined a voluntary, interactive system of censorship, which preserved freedom of choice. Whenever the BBFC veered towards a more dictatorial policy, cries of "state

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censorship" rang from yet another collection of watchdog groups. The BBFC tread a precise, narrow policy.

Not so the local county councils, which could adopt their own rules and in some cases had no formal rules or regulations at all. The BBFC spent much of the early 1930s forging alliances with the local authorities, with British film makers (which did little good, for they were not the problem) and the various civic groups. And late in 1931, the first suggestions rose to add a third rating to the system. Some talked of a rating to forbid children from attendance; some talked of an "R" ("Recommended") reserved for wholesome entertainments. The BBFC saw the first suggestion as against its basic charter and the second as useless. But the question brewed until the meeting at Caxton Hall brought the issue to open confrontation.

Through 1932 and 1933, tighter film censorship continued to be raised. *Frankenstein* opened in London in January 1932. The Tivoli Theater voluntarily posted a warning of the film's unsuitability for children, but admitted them anyway. The BBFC banned *Freaks* in 1932 and *Island of Lost Souls* in 1933. These films would not be shown in Britain until 1963 and 1958, respectively.

Also, in 1933, a meeting of the National Federation of Women's Institutes noted "a very acute feeling throughout the assembly about the tone of many films and the need for stricter control." The conference of the National Union of Women Teachers issued the statement that:

"It was wrong and absurd that simply because they were accompanied by parents and guardians children could see films intended for adults only. A more sensible regulation was needed that would definitely prevent children from seeing them whether accompanied by guardians or not."

The Film Censorship Consultative Committee, of which the BBFC was the guiding force, answered that statement with the usual reply that it would not take from parents control of what their children viewed.

That same year, the National Council of Women passed a resolution "urgently appealing to the British Board of Film Censors to exercise more stringently their powers of censorship in regard to cinema films depicting scenes of brutality and violence". The Public Morality Council, chiefly concerned with animal welfare, supported the statement, and added:

"The brutality and violence depicted in many films was not confined to animals; it was to be found in gangster films, in certain films dealing with penal methods in other countries, and in some of the sensational and horrific films recently presented... Abnormally hyper-sensitive and nervously exhausted people were specially attracted by a programme of horrors. They were also most responsive to suggestions of terror, and suffered most injury from the experience."

Most viewers, countered the opposition, showed no ill affects from by such films. "If that were true," responded the PMC spokeswoman, "it would seem to be the most crushing indictment of all."

Prior to 1933, the BBFC had never given a horror film an "A" certificate. That year, it gave three — to *Vampire Bat*, *Invisible Man* and *Son of Kong*. But *Mystery of the Wax Museum*, *King Kong* and *Murders in the Zoo*, released that same year in Britain, were rated "U". Obviously, the BBFC wavered under the pressure and was growing uncertain, or at least inconsistent, about horror films.

The debate in Britain now focussed more explicitly on horror films. In the United States, the revised Production Code had been issued and forced films to tone down sex and violence. Horror films were largely unaffected. *The Black Cat* was the only new horror film of 1934, but the momentum of the drive carried into Caxton Hall

late that year, and brought the cry for an "H" rating which would forbid attendance by children.

June 1935: the premiere of *Werewolf of London*, the first werewolf film:

"...neither man nor wolf, but a satanic creature with the worst qualities of both... The werewolf instinctively seeks to kill the thing it loves best," Yogami warns Glendon, who has just returned from Tibet with a flower which blooms only by the moon and which, legend says, is an anecdote for werewolfery. While in Tibet Glendon was bitten by a strange creature. On the first night of the full moon, as his neglected wife Lisa goes out for a rare evening on the town, Glendon races to his laboratory, only to find that the two blooms of the moonflower have been stolen. Transformed to a werewolf, he kills a woman on each of the next two nights. On the third night, he attacks Lisa, but she escapes. That same night a woman is killed in Yogami's quarters. On the fourth night, Yogami takes the last moonflower blossom, and Glendon at last realizes that Yogami was the



Glenn Strange in *House Of Frankenstein* (1944).

thing that attacked him in Tibet. The werewolf kills Yogami, and attacks Lisa. He is shot down by the police.

Sound films demanded a new type of script, and movie producers found them largely in recent stage plays. In the 1920s weird mysteries and melodramas were in vogue on Broadway. From 1928 to 1931 — as silence yielded to sound — Hollywood brought to the screen *The Terror*, *The 13th Chair*, *The Cat Creeps*, *The Bat Whispers* and *The Gorilla*. The last and perhaps greatest of this brief genre was *Dracula*, released in 1931. No one realized that, with "the vampire play," Hollywood had stumbled onto an almost new form of movie. Warner Brothers issued *Sengali* and *The Mad Genius* that same year, but not until *Frankenstein* appeared in December did the Hollywood studios truly grasp the potential of what we today call horror films.

1932 and 1933 saw the first surge of American horror films. Never before had filmgoers — or film censors — seen such a flow of films intended first and foremost to frighten them. Hollywood released "horror" films, many in some sense considered "classics" today, at the rate of about one per month. The list, if again "weird" melodramas and the quests of evil geniuses are thrown in, includes:

*The Vampire Bat*  
*Murders in the Rue Morgue*  
*Island of Lost Souls*  
*Freaks*  
*Mystery of the Wax Museum*  
*White Zombie*  
*King Kong*  
*Supernatural*  
*Old Dark House*  
*Murders in the Zoo*  
*Chandu the Magician*  
*Night of Terror*  
*The Most Dangerous Game*  
*The Sphinx*  
*Mask of Fu Manchu*  
*Invisible Man*  
*The Mummy*  
*Son of Kong*

These films faced substantial censorship problems in the United States. *Dracula*, somewhat unexpected, slipped through without too much interference from the watchdogs. Not so the films that followed. The Midwest would be a particularly difficult region for horror films to play. Kansas censors effectively banned *Frankenstein* by demanding 34 cuts, including virtually all of the closing reel. Chicago, then the country's second biggest market after New York, initially banned *Murders in the Rue Morgue* outright. Only some last minute negotiations and probably some cuts got the film on the Windy City's screens. *Freaks* and *Island of Lost Souls* had as much difficulty in the States as in England; *Freaks* suffered a virtual ban. Most horror films triggered mandatory adults-only restrictions at least in parts of the States, including some major cities.

The cuts that censors and studios required are part of these films' lore — *Frankenstein's* monster drowning little Maria, the mutilation of the circus strong man in "Freaks," giant spiders finishing off Kong's victims, while Kong strips the dress from Ann Darrow, Jekyll spontaneously transforming into Hyde as he watches a cat pounce on a bird, the rearrangement of scenes in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* to diminish their impact. Recent studies of horror films [Gregory Mank's *Karloff and Lugosi* (1990) and his preface to *Countess Dracula* (1994), Brunas' & Weaver's *Universal Horrors* (1990) and David Skal's *The Monster Show* (1993), Philip Riley's ongoing series of classic horror film scripts] have begun documenting what the early 1930s films were intended to be before the censors or the studio managements got to them.

Despite the censorship, these films contain some of the strongest and most lingering images of the era, almost all of them perversely sexual in nature: *Dracula*, oblivious to the mores and morals of Victorian London, sweeping into his victims' bedrooms; *Frankenstein*, in a laboratory gown that looks like a maternity dress, "birthing" his monster amidst cries of ecstasy and agony; Ivy cringing in horror as she realizes that her brutal, sadistic "lover," Mr. Hyde, intends to spend the night; Mirakle kneeling as if in prayer before the suspended body of the prostitute he has tortured and murdered; the knives of the *Freaks* glittering in the lightning as they entrap the circus strongman and trapeze artist; the knives of the vengeful animal men as they stretch Dr. Moreau on his operating table in the *House of Pain*; Legendre "consuming" Madelaine's wedding night in a zombie ritual; Amy Lou, all but naked, shivering in fear on Roxor's slave auction block; Fah Lo See (Fu Manchu's daughter) screaming "Faster! Faster!" as her love slave is whipped; Ivan Igor shouting "My Marie Antoinette! My Marie Antoinette" as he drowns his victim in a bath of molten wax; Imho-tep pleading with his reincarnated princess to remember their love of 3,700 years before — years through which she has slept and he has suffered;



Zaroff rhapsodizing "Kill — then Love! When you have known that, you have known ecstasy!"; Jack Griffin transforming before our eyes from a tender lover to a raving madman, drunk with the power of invisibility. And Kong, perched on the Empire State Building, sacrificing everything for a love only a fraction of his size.

Beneath these compelling images are themes from the darkest realms of human desires. Perhaps what so enraged the censors was not that these themes were too exotic, but all too commonplace. One of the most common elements of the early horror films is superhuman, inhuman sexual repression and denial. Most of these films fall into two basic plots. In the first (as in *Dracula*, *White Zombie*, *Mask of Fu Manchu*, etc.) into a staid, sterile setting comes a protagonist — a monster — who ignores the societal constraints and sates his lusts. In the second (as in *Frankenstein*, *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, *The Mummy*, etc.), the protagonist suffers incredible repression and finally breaks free in horrifying vengeance. All the monsters, whether they be "highbrows" (the noblemen, the doctors) or "lowbrows" (the monsters, Moreau's animal men, Browning's freaks) have appetites and desires which can no longer be contained or even satisfied.

Small wonder that powerful elements of society sought to suppress such images and the messages beneath them. Portraying censors and civic groups of the 1930s as self-righteous and provincial is quite easy in 1995, but never before had filmmakers faced the images hurled at them in the first years of sound films.

July 1935: the premiere of *The Raven*, Universal's second teaming of Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and Edgar Allan Poe:

"Poe was a great genius. There was in him, like all great geniuses a persistent will to do something big, great, constructive in the world. But he fell in love; her name was Lenore... Someone took her away from him. When a man of genius is denied of his great love, he goes mad. His brain, instead of being clear to do his great work, is tortured. So, he begins to think of torture — torture for those who have tortured him." When surgeon Richard Vollin speaks of Poe, he speaks of himself. He plots a fiendish revenge on Jean Thatcher, who has refused him. He first mutilates the face of Bateman, an escaped killer, and promises to restore him only in exchange for his help. "You are monstrously ugly! And your monstrous ugliness breeds monstrous hate. Good! I can use your hate." Vollin invites Jean, her father and her fiancé to his mansion, and soon traps them in torture devices based on Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*. Bateman, unwilling to carry out Vollin's final stroke, frees the captives and locks Vollin in "the room where the walls come together." Vollin is crushed to death.

Though virtually every American studio produced horror films in 1932-1933, they soon grew wary of the risks, especially after MGM (*Freaks*) and Paramount (*Island of Lost Souls*) swallowed huge losses. The studios' dedication to the genre was always tentative. *Variety* of March 15, 1932 ran this notice:

"Stories previously placed in the horror class by Universal are now being defined as 'weird mysteries' by this studio, which for a while was wild about horror yarns."

*Island of Lost Souls* is an unrelenting horror film, yet this almost comical notice ran in *Variety* in November 8, 1932:

"Admittedly a horror picture, Paramount is trying to find a selling angle for *Island of Lost Souls* that will eliminate reference to it as such. With the cycle of blood and thunder deemed passed, studio is afraid *Lost Souls* will do a dive unless the creepy angle is eliminated."

Horror could not yet be declared out of vogue in November 1932, but one by one the studios cut horror from their production plans. In the short term horror was doomed — by a market in saturation, by domestic censors ever vigilant and foreign censors ever ready to ban a film entirely, by the overall pressures that would culminate in the Production Code of 1934. By mid-1933 no new horror films were in production; with the release of *Son of Kong* late that year nothing new was even planned. Paramount released *Death Takes a Holiday* in 1934, but painstakingly eliminated any horror elements. The result is a stilted, self-conscious film.

Universal's perennial money troubles saved horror. The studio gambled on uniting Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi with Edgar Allan Poe in 1934's *The Black Cat*. It was Universal's biggest moneymaker of the year. Horror, at least at Universal, was back.

*The Black Cat* is also one of the most mangled films of the era. Director Edgar G. Ulmer intended the film to be a showcase for his visions on the dark



Lugosi in *Voodoo Man* (1946).

side of humanity — rape, torture and murder against a backdrop of satanism, necrophilia, incest, oedipal lusts and the like. That virtually all the revisions and cuts came from the studio and not the censors shows the new sensitivity in 1934 Hollywood. The result, quite unwittingly, is actually a morbid biography of Bela Lugosi (the parallels of his character, Vitus Werdegast, to his own life are obvious) and a testament to the screen power of its two stars. Karloff and Lugosi not only hold together a very disjointed and inconsistent tale, but elevate it to almost "classic" status among 1930s horror films.

Ultimately, the dismemberment of *The Black Cat* is the fault of its makers' perverse naivety as to what could reach the screen in 1934. In 1935, unwittingly or otherwise, Universal showed much more finesse in imbuing its horror films with deviant elements. And, apart from star power, the regard in which *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *Werewolf of London*, *The Raven*, *The Invisible Ray* and *Dracula's Daughter* are held today is directly proportional to their ability to transcend simple monster tales and probe the shadowy realms of human sexuality.

As during the early 1930s, the other studios only reluctantly followed Universal into horror in 1935. But 1932 saw originality, imagination and daring, 1935 saw caution and trepidation. Paramount, which had produced *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Island of Lost Souls*, simply ignored horror. Warner Brothers, second only to Universal in

its early horror output, waited until 1936 to offer a very tame film, *The Walking Dead*. Columbia did give Karloff a meaty role in *The Black Room*, and the independents made some significant contributions — most notably Monogram's *Mysterious Mr. Wong* (with Lugosi), Republic's *Crime of Dr. Crespi* (with Erich von Stroheim) and *Invincible's Condemned to Live*.

At RKO, Merian C. Cooper, producer of *The Most Dangerous Game* and *King Kong*, now made *She*. *She* is more an adventure film than a thriller, but it did feature the first supernatural female protagonist, a female Im-ho-tep waiting patiently through the tormented centuries for the reincarnation of his lover. In 1935 and 1936, women would at last achieve more than victim status in horror films — with momentous consequences as we shall soon see.

Other than Universal, the only studio nominally to return to horror was MGM. MGM produced three horror films in 1935-1936. The first, *Mark of the Vampire*, was a commercial success, but is arguably the greatest waste of talent, including Bela Lugosi in dazzling vampire regalia, in horror film history. The trappings of horror were present, but the film was denuded of any provocative elements by studio watchdogs (especially producer Eddie Mannix, whose sole responsibility was apparently to watch over director Tod Browning). The second MGM horror film of 1935, *Mad Love*, is arguably the only non-Universal horror film of 1935-1936 from a major studio worthy of attention today. The film features a discomfiting performance by Peter Lorre, numerous touches by director Karl Freund, and revives a minor character from *Freaks* (Rollo, the knife thrower, played by Edward Brophy in both films) in fleeting homage to the excitement of a few years before. But the pressure *Mad Love* received from censors and civic groups dissuaded MGM from any such notions in the future. The studio's last horror film of the period, 1936's *Devil Doll*, is a safe, studio product. Both *Mark of the Vampire* and *Devil Doll* feature the same reliable but overrated star (Lionel Barrymore) and director (Tod Browning), and neither strayed from the predictable.

August, 1935: the premiere of MGM's *Mad Love*, Peter Lorre's first starring role in America:

"Tonight, I'm sad, for no longer will I be able to watch you from my lonely, shadowed box," Yvonne Orlac reads a note from Dr. Gogol, her most devoted fan. Yvonne is the star of "Le Theater des Horreurs". Every evening, every performance finds surgeon Gogol watching her tortured on the rack until she names her lover. In his attic Gogol plays the organ through the night for his "love" — a wax statue of Yvonne. Stephen Orlac, a pianist, is badly injured in a train wreck, and Yvonne begs Gogol to save her husband's crushed hands. Gogol secretly grafts the hands of a guillotined knife-murderer onto Orlac. Orlac slowly realizes that he has acquired a compulsion to throw knives. Gogol murders Orlac's stepfather and convinces him that he, Orlac, is the killer. But it is Gogol who is slipping into madness. When Yvonne visits Gogol, he sees only the wax statue come to life, and strangles her. With the sure skill of his new hands, Orlac kills Gogol with a knife.

In 1934, the BBFC slapped an "A" rating on *The Black Cat* and banned Universal's *Life Returns* (a dismal travesty, mercifully excluded from the pantheon of Universal horror films of the era). Such stern treatments of horror films did nothing to distract the juggernaut of the combined power of the diverse civic groups — the consortium forged at Caxton Hall — all insisting on an overhaul of the censorship system. Their demands soon reached the highest levels of the British government.

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House Of Frankenstein (1944).

On January 14, 1935, the Prime Minister of Britain, J. Ramsay MacDonald, flanked by the British Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland, received a delegation of about two dozen people at 10 Downing Street. The topic was film censorship, and the delegation included three Members of Parliament, four Christian clergymen, one rabbi and the Archbishop of Canterbury. The groups represented included the National Cinema Inquiry Committee, the National Council of Women, the National Union of Teachers, the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches, the Jewish Community, the Salvation Army, the Parents' National Education Union, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Mothers' Union, the Public Morality Council, the National Association of Schoolmasters and the National Union of Women Teachers.

The Government leaders heard of the "unsatisfactory and disquieting character of the situation with regard to recreation and entertainment films... The cumulative effect of viewing, week after week, themes of ungoverned human passions could not but undermine and confuse the ideas of right and wrong, of the normal and the abnormal, and lead to a craving for thrills in real life comparable with those of the screen."

Impressive visitors and persuasive arguments failed to sway the Government leaders. "Inquiries," politely warned the Prime Minister, "particularly perhaps when any question of morals was involved, did not always yield all the results expected from them." The Home Secretary then described "the difficulty of reaching general agreement on matters largely of taste."

The British press of course covered the meeting. In a January 16 editorial, *The London Times* wrote: "...the young, the unsophisticated, the slightly educated are so many that they need protection against evils of which they are hardly aware. Supposing that the distinction between innocent and injurious films were, indeed, only a matter of taste, the taste of a vast number of cinema-goers cannot be held to be so trained and formed as to be capable of deciding right. We make no bones

about training and correcting the taste of our children; and in a sense a very great many of the cinema-goers are but children. The public taste may be the ultimate standard; but that taste first needs training."

Through January and February 1935, the film censorship debate appeared almost daily in Britain's newspapers. Both the "freedom" forces and the "decency" forces held firm, but the BBFC, fighting the usual charge that its funding came solely from the film industry, was clearly on the defensive. The Cinematograph Exhibitors Association — that is, the theater owners — went on the offensive. Regarding the impressive deputation that had visited the Prime Minister, the CEA opined "we doubt whether they really represent any considerable body of the general public which frequents the cinema." The CEA then decided one of its most vocal critics, the local censors of Croydon. In 1933 and 1934, the Croydon board independently rated over a thousand films, rejected about two hundred and attacked the BBFC, which had "rejected" (banned) about 30 during the same period, as too lenient. The CEA proved that the Croydon board had actually viewed only 20 of the films it rated. The rest had been approved or rejected based solely on titles, stars and synopses. The "Croydon Experiment" became something of a joke within the CEA, but the example of a local censor independently rating films would not be forgotten.

This high profile, well publicized debate of early 1935 addressed the role of censorship in a free society, and specific reforms were hardly mentioned. But talk of a new "H" rating soon returned — just as Universal and MGM unleashed their summer horrors in Britain. "A" ratings would go to *Mark of the Vampire*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, *Werewolf of London*, *The Raven* and *Mad Love*. More American horror films received "A" ratings in 1935 than in all previous years combined. But the reformers remained unimpressed. They claimed that, in the present system under "the so-called Censor," "children still had the run of the cinema, no matter whether the films were 'A' or 'U', or whether the children were accompanied by parent or guardian." The BBFC might have sated the reformers by banning these films, but film bans were simply not a tool the BBFC would use for political reasons. These films did receive rough treatment from local censors. *Bride of Frankenstein*, for instance, was banned entirely from the Isle of Jersey.

As David Skal (in 1993's *The Monster Show*) and Robert Cremer (in 1976's *Lugosi, the Man Behind the Cape*) have both noted, *The Raven* particularly galled the reformers and challenged the censors. In retrospect, that the BBFC did not ban *The Raven* is incredible, for the film dwelt on the elements that the BBFC usually frowned on — sordid medical details, torture and physical disfigurement. Whether *The Raven* received an "A" because the BBFC had silently resolved not to ban any horror films as a show of its position can be reasonably asked.

In the early 1930s *The London Times* had been

unbiased in reviewing horror films. In 1934 *The Times* gave *The Black Cat* (released in Britain as *House of Doom*) arguably the most favorable review the film received in any major newspaper. In 1935 *The Times* became strongly opposed to horror. The entire crop of 1935 films was either ignored (*Mark of the Vampire*) or given rough treatment — *Bride of Frankenstein* ("sad to see such personalities wasted on a production with so ignoble a motive"), *Werewolf of London* ("never succeeds in catching a vibrating atmosphere"), *The Raven* ("there is neither life nor horror in this film"), *Mad Love* (released in Britain as *Hands of Orlac*, "never free from monotony, the grotesque and the gruesome"). On its editorial pages, *The Times* squarely sided with the reformers.

Throughout the summer of 1935, as Universal flooded the country with new horrors and as the voice of the reformers rose, Edward Shortt hardly budged. On July 27, 1935 the BBFC President addressed the CEA's annual conference and reaffirmed his position "that film must be allowed this same freedom accorded other forms of dramatic art." In its coverage of his address, the *London Times* reported:

"Referring to a certain type of American film, Mr. Shortt said he did not believe that any single film could have a lasting effect on the public, but the result of the same theme repeated over and over again might be most undesirable."

He was speaking of horror films.

His address to the CEA was Shortt's last public appearance. That summer he contracted influenza and died of complications on November 10, 1935, at age 73. He has been BBFC president since 1929, and had steered the Board through its most trying years. His replacement was William George Lord Tyrrell, 69. Like Shortt, Tyrrell carried an impressive resume of civic service and government posts. Until his appointment, the controversy over "horrific" films had been waged between agencies and boards. Lord Tyrrell gave the debate a face. He has quite unjustly been characterized as a villain both by some of the reform groups and by incautious film historians unaware that the true role of the BBFC in the episode. Actually, when he took the BBFC presidency, the most dramatic moments had yet to unfold, but the outcome was already decided. The outcry against horror films, spurred by Universal's output through the summer of 1935, was already unstoppable. Tyrrell did no more than attempt to continue the policies of Shortt against a rising opposition.

January 1936: the premiere of *The Invisible Ray*, Universal's third teaming of Karloff and Lugosi:

"My father idolized him, and when he died I promised him that I'd marry Janos." But Janos Rukh is wed first to his work, to proving his ridiculed theories. At a dramatic demonstration he convinces an audience, including the skeptical Felix Benet, that a huge meteor struck Africa eons ago. During the long expedition to Nigeria, Rukh deserts the team, including his neglected wife Diana, and finds the strange meteor. But exposure to "Radium X" poisons Rukh, and his slightest touch is fatal. Benet perfects a temporary anecdote, but Radium X and the anecdote slowly drive Rukh mad. When Diana deserts him and when Benet announces Rukh's discovery to the world, Rukh plots his revenge. He fakes his own death, and Diana soon marries her lover. "He shan't reach out of his grave and spoil our lives." One-by-one Rukh hunts down the expedition members and kills them with his touch. Finally, when he cannot bring himself to kill Diana, Rukh is consumed by his own radiation.

What so offended the watchdogs that these horror films should be singled out — both in Britain and America — for special censorship? In



January 1936, the *New York Times* unwittingly revealed what was not the reason. An editorial "Gory, Gory Hallelujah — Being an Inquiry into the Cinema's Recent Trend in Horror," notes "the increasing emphasis the cinema is placing on the shocking details of physical torture and brutality. Hollywood has been treating us to emotional horror orgies and the box-office evidence shows that we have been deriving from them a satisfaction." The piece further ponders that "this reversion to an almost morbid delight in witnessing the phenomena of pain, far from being an accidental and meaningless sort of thing, may be related very distinctly to the national state of mind." In developing its case, the editorial mentions 12 films from 1935, including *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935's Oscar winner for Best Picture), as well as *David Copperfield*, *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* and *Ruggles of Red Gap* (all Oscar nominees for Best Picture). The sole horror film mentioned is *Mad Love*, whose portrayals of pain and torture pale in comparison to those films listed above. The simple fact is that the major popular films of the mid-1930s contain far more horrifying and revolting scenes than the so-called horror films. Anyone who grew up in the 1950s, watching films from the 1930s on television — as I did — has vivid memories of some of the most harrowing scenes of the era: Basil Rathbone's birching of Freddie Bartholomew in *David Copperfield*; the on-screen flogging and branding of *Captain Blood*. I was not yet 10 years old when I saw those films and others just as powerful on Sunday afternoons at my grandparents. Yet I had to beg to stay up late to see old horror films, which enthralled me but never really scared me. Horror films of 1935 were hardly in the vanguard of explicit or even implicit depictions of horror.

What horror films did uniquely offer the filmgoing public was a variety of psychosexual themes under a veneer of supernatural and science fiction elements. Also, horror films had a near monopoly on such difficult topics as insanity, physical deformity and suicide, which the mainline pictures largely ignored.

In *Werewolf of London* and *The Invisible Ray*, the protagonists (Glendon and Rukh) turn from loving wives, from normal lives, to pursue great quests. Both achieve their goals, but at a terrible price. They can no longer return to a normal life — Glendon because a werewolf must kill the woman he loves, Rukh because his touch is now deadly. As in *Genesis*, knowledge is gained only by forfeiting Eden, but these films are parables of a darker message — to deny the normal instincts is to pervert them; sexual repression and denial create monsters. Both Glendon and Rukh long to embrace the women they love, but their earlier repressions have cursed them to inhuman isolation. Both films contain the same moving scene: standing on opposite sides of a doorway the wife begs the husband to join her. He can only refuse, for he alone knows passing through means her death. After those confrontations, the killing begins — denied the normal outlets Glendon and Rukh can only turn to violence and murder.

*The Raven* and *Mad Love* offer stronger men who brook no such torments. Vollin and Gogol are geniuses of towering intellects and achievements, but both live in an isolated, delicate balance with their darker drives. Vollin placates his by building torture devices in his basement ("It is more than a hobby," he unnecessarily tells us); Gogol by watching "Le Theater des Horreurs" from his "lonely, shadowed box". They are drawn from these unhappy but productive equilibria by women they have fleetingly possessed. In surgery, Vollin saves Jean's life, Gogol saves Yvonne's husband. But when they fail to possess their women entirely, their only recourse — their only hope to regain that lost balance — is to kill their "tormentors".

In all these films except *Werewolf of London*, fathers play a subtle but pivotal role. James Twitchell's 1986 book *Dreadful Pleasures* details the importance of the father figure in horror stories — not to be delved into here, but Twitchell basically contends that all the enduring horror legends are encoded tales of incest. In *The Raven* Jean's father, not her fiancé, fights Vollin; and it is the father whom Vollin first deals with before taking revenge on Jean. In *The Invisible Ray*, it is Diana's father that forces her to marry Rukh, who is certainly old enough to be her father himself. It is Benet, another commanding father figure, and not Diana's boyish lover, who battles Rukh. In *Mad Love* only fathers are murdered. Rollo the knife thrower is guillotined for killing his father; Gogol re-enacts this crime by killing Orlac's stepfather (and blaming Orlac). Finally, Orlac indeed kills a father figure, Gogol himself. The *Hands of Orlac* are not the hands of a killer, but the hands of a patricide. Even in *Werewolf of London*, the shallowest of these four films, Glendon appears much older than his wife, and acts more like a strict parent than a spouse. Rukh, though much older than his wife, acts more like a child, and he always has his sage mother nearby to treat him like one.

Of course, these films are not primarily studies in abnormal psychology. They are commercial products from Hollywood intended for popular consumption. In the practical world of tight schedules and budgets, limited talent, studio pressures and official and unofficial censorship, the films occasionally undermine their own themes, or fail to exploit opportunities to advance them. That these studio productions carry their themes as clearly as they do is quite remarkable, and not coincidental. There's nothing coincidental about the two darkest masterpieces of the era, *The Black Cat* and *Bride of Frankenstein*. Both are their director's personal visions of human perversity, and veer from rape to necrophilia to madness to sadism to incest to homoeroticism to suicide. Both plots lead to the same finale: the protagonist — i.e., the repressed, tormented hero now unleashed — pulls the lever that destroys him and his tormentors. *Bride of Frankenstein* reached the screen more in tact that *The Black Cat* mainly because James Whale was more clever and less perverse than Edgar G. Ulmer. Brunas' & Weaver's *Universal Horrors* (1990) details the orgy of perversion that Ulmer originally intended "The Black Cat" to be.

The bland and disappointing *Mark of the Vampire* attempted to delve into the most forbidden taboo. As scripted, the two vampires, Count Mora and Luna, are father and daughter. Their incestuous relationship in life, followed by Mora's killing Luna and then himself, damned to them to rise from their graves as the Undead. Nothing of this survives in the final cut. Today, only a handful of stills showing Mora (Lugosi) lustfully embracing Luna documents the original plan. Lugosi's face, aglow with unholy passion, leaves no doubt as to his intentions. The penalty inflicted on *Mark of the Vampire* for such daring was to be stripped of any interesting elements and reduced to an ordinary murder mystery. It hardly deserves the "A" rating given it by the BBFC.

Perhaps the most interesting working of a vampire theme came not from a major studio, but from the very obscure *Condemned to Live*. The film delves into homoeroticism and physical deformity (both embodied by the same character), but as with *The Raven* and *Mad Love*, its basic plot is that the protagonist, once aroused, can no longer contain the demonic forces lurking within him. In *Condemned to Live*, a pregnant woman is attacked by a "bat". Vampirism lies dormant in her son until, as a middle-aged man, he falls in love with a much younger woman. Then the grisly murders begin. Linking the onset of supernatural powers or curses

with sexual awakening has become a staple of modern horror films, but the theme has clear roots in the 1930s.

May 1935 presented a rarity in 1930s horror films — female monsters, namely the bride of Frankenstein and Luna the vampire. In the horror films of 1931-1933, women are either victims or at best resilient heroines. The sole exceptions are *Dracula* which fleetingly includes four female vampires (Dracula's wives and Lucy) and *Freaks*, whose "monsters" are male, female and both. She, released in July 1935, offered the first female "monster" in a major role. By horror film standards, her plight is a familiar one — patiently waiting through the endless centuries for the reincarnation of her lover. Women as protagonists added new possibilities and dimensions to the themes into which horror films almost invariably stray. When Universal finally presented a female monster in a lead role, complete with patricidal and bisexual leanings and embodying a theme that women convey much better than men, the BBFC could no longer resist the outcry of the reformers.

May 1936: the premiere of *Dracula's Daughter*, Universal's sequel to *Dracula*:

"You think this night will be like all the others, don't you? Well, you're wrong. Dracula is destroyed. His body is in ashes. The spell is broken. I can lead a normal life, now. Think normal things. I can even play normal music again." Dracula's daughter, Marya Zaleska, hopes that she will be forever freed from her father's curse. She and her assistant Sandor, steal Dracula's body and burn it in a strange ritual. But each evening she takes a new victim. She seeks the help of a psychiatrist, an unbelieving Jeffrey Garth, who advises that she confront her fears. Sandor brings a young girl, Lili, to Marya's studio. Marya takes Lili. "It came over me again. That overpowering command — wordless, insistent — and I had to obey." Lili survives long enough to convince Garth that Marya is a vampire. Marya has abandoned hope of escaping the curse of Dracula. She and Sandor return to Transylvania. Marya wants Garth as her undead mate — a plan which enrages Sandor. When Garth arrives at Castle Dracula, Sandor shoots an arrow at him, but hits Marya. The wooden shaft pierces her heart and ends her undead existence.

Marya's seduction of Lili, and later her near-taking of Garth's female assistant are among the most erotic scenes on the 1930s horror films. They contain strong, unmistakable overtones of lesbianism. By comparison the scene of Marya's taking of her sole male victim in the film is flat and uninspired. Much has been written of the lesbian elements, most recently in Andrea Weiss' 1993 *Violets and Virgins*. They obscure the true, consistent message of *Dracula's Daughter*, a message probably much clearer to audiences in 1935 than in 1936. As conveyed by Gloria Holden's tragic, majestic performance, Marya is struggling to overcome the guilt and horror of memories of an abusive parent. At one point, the film explicitly emphasizes that theme. No sooner is her father destroyed than Marya plays on piano a "cradle song, the song my mother once sang to me long, long ago, rocking me to sleep as she sang in the twilight". As her mind ponders the twilight (exactly when her nocturnal father would come to her), her thoughts and her music turn threatening. Soon Marya is again prowling the streets for her next victim. That censors of 1936 grasped at least some part of that theme is evident in the reaction the film provoked.

Universal did not wait for the British reformers. *Dracula's Daughter* was released in Britain in July, but the May 6, 1936 issue of *Variety* ran this article: "Horror Films Taken Off U Sked"

(continued)

Universal is ringing curfew on horror picture production for at least a year, following release of *Dracula's Daughter*, just completed. Latter will be released on current season's schedule, with no chiller pictures contemplated for 1936-1937 release.

Reason attributed by U for abandonment of horror cycle is that European countries, especially England, are prejudiced against this type product. Despite heavy local consumption of its chillers, U is taking heed to warning from abroad.

Universal has for long time had virtual monopoly on this type of production, with unusual success at box office.

Studio's London rep has cautioned production exec to scrutinize carefully all so-called chiller productions, to avoid any possible conflict with British censorship.

The announcement was hardly news in the film industry. *The Invisible Ray* completed production in September 1935 and no new projects for Karloff or Lugosi had been announced since then. "Dracula's Daughter" finished filming in March 1936 and no horror films were on Universal's production schedule. From the other studios 1936 also saw the release of Warner Brothers *The Walking Dead* (in March), the Halperin Brothers' *Revolt of the Zombies* (June) and MGM's *Devil Doll* (August). By mid-year, horror film production had entirely ceased. In effect the reformers had already won their battle with the producers, but they still needed official sanctions to prevent horror from returning again as it had in 1934. They also needed a victory over the BBFC.

With *Dracula's Daughter* two traditions in British film censorship were shattered. Throughout all the news coverage and editorials on the censorship controversy, no film was mentioned by name. The censors correctly believed that naming such films ensured their box office success. That taboo was broken for *Dracula's Daughter*, which was cited often in the British newspapers of the summer of 1936. Also with *Dracula's Daughter* came the usurping of the BBFC's role in rating films. The County Councils of London, Middlesex and Surrey — following Croydon's furtive example of a few years before — bypassed the BBFC and independently gave *Dracula's Daughter* an "H" rating.

Two weeks earlier, in his first address to the CEA, Lord Tyrrell stressed that only two ratings existed, "U" and "A". He specifically stated that "the horrific category no longer exists". The actions of the three county councils were thus an open affront to the BBFC. In London, an "H" still required only that a warning be posted outside the theater, but Surrey and Middlesex now forbid children from attending an "H" film.

The open standoff between the BBFC and the local councils again brought censorship to the headlines. In an August 1936 editorial, the *London Times*, which deigned not to review *Dracula's Daughter*, again sided with the reformers:

"Death itself grows cheap with custom, and cinema audiences, as bloodthirsty, one is expected to believe, as any who went to the open-air theater in Imperial Rome, must have no chance of being bored. Nowadays the scope for fortitude is much extended; the hero of the screen is asked to pit his courage against a new race of demoniac monsters and scientists possessed.... The favorite purpose of an operation on the screen is either disfigurement or the creation of a monster who will presently be employed to stalk the heroine, most likely in a graveyard.... Especially for children this type of film must seem the stuff of nightmares.... 'Horrible' is the adjective that obviously applies to such nightmare films; and 'horrific' is the label which the British Board of Film Censors is expected to attach to them as a warning that they are unsuitable for children. That the attachment of the 'hor-

rific' label to three recent films had been left to the licensing authorities is a serious reflection on the Board. Or is it merely that the Board has seen so many films that its judgment is no longer to be trusted."

[Note: The Times is slightly incorrect — it was not three films labelled "horrific, but three local councils so labelling one film]

The London County Council then announced that as of January 1, 1937 children under 16 could not attend "H" rated films. Other county councils soon did the same, and across Britain "horrific" films were virtually banned. The local councils also retained the right to issue their own ratings. Faced with the prospect that local authorities would rate films themselves, the BBFC quietly reinstituted the "H" certificate, and began rebuilding its relationships with the local censors. The BBFC was after all funded entirely by fees charged for rating films. If its ratings became irrelevant, the BBFC would soon be out of business. And a Britain without a BBFC would result in exactly the censorship chaos the BBFC was meant to avoid — no uniform rating of films; each locality controlling film distribution according to its own whim. The battle, whether "freedom" vs. "decency" or a turf war between local and national authorities, was over.

No horror films would be produced in America for almost three years. Karloff and Lugosi, who separately or as a team had made a dozen classic horror films in under five years, did not appear in a single film of merit. Lugosi was almost entirely unemployed. Employment-wise, Karloff fared better, but his films of 1936-1938 are a sorry lot.

Not entirely by coincidence, 1937 and 1938 were dismal years for the American motion picture industry, but major motion pictures continued to portray horrors as no horror film would have dared. Perhaps the most lingering of these images comes from *Marie Antoinette* — a French noblewoman is thrown to the Revolutionary rabble. Her fate is conveyed through the horrified, unbelieving faces of Queen Marie and Louis XVI — obviously she is being ravaged and raped by a mob just offscreen. Again, I first saw this scene at a tender age on television on Sunday afternoon at grandma's. What was left of "horror" fell, ironically, to Walt Disney. 1934's *Babes In Toyland* showed that horror stories fit quite well into children's films, and Henry Brandon's Silas Barnaby is one of the grand horror villains of the era. Disney picked up the theme in 1937's *Snow White*. That film has many horror elements. If it does not consciously borrow from *White Zombie* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, it certainly carries on the tradition. For blending such diverse elements in animation, Disney received universal praise and even a special Oscar, but he had only achieved what the best horror films had been doing since 1931, aimed at a slightly younger audience. Getting such films past the censors at all and to the youngest moviegoers was, as we have seen, no mean feat. And then as now, Disney animation was occasionally criticized for including some pretty strong stuff.

In 1939 — so the cliché goes — horror came roaring back. In 1938 Universal, as always desperate for cash, re-released *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* on a double bill. The gimmick exceeded all expectations, and convinced the studio that the domestic market could support a resurgence of horror. And so, as in 1931 and 1935, Universal brought horror back, followed sheepishly by the other studios. From 1939 to 1946 horror was again in vogue in the United States.

The "H" certificate lasted through 1950, when it was replaced by an "X," covering all unsuitable films. From January 1, 1937 to January 1, 1951, the BBFC rated 37 films as "H". The complete list of

"H" rated films, from an appendix in Denis Gifford's 1973 *Horror Movie Monsters* is:

- 1937:  
*The 13th Chair*
- 1938:  
*J'Accuse*
- 1939:  
*Son of Frankenstein*  
*The Monster Walks*  
*Boy Slaves*  
*The Gorilla*  
*Dark Eyes of London*  
*Hell's Kitchen*  
*On Borrowed Time*  
*A Child is Born*  
*Man They Could Not Hang*  
*Return of Dr. X*  
*The Cat and the Canary*
- 1941:  
*The Monster & the Girl*
- 1942:  
*Ghost of Frankenstein*
- 1945:  
*United Nations War Crimes Film*  
*Invisible Man's Revenge*  
*Return of the Vampire*
- 1946:  
*Bedlam (banned)*  
*The Mad Ghoul*  
*The Lady & the Monster*  
*Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman*  
*The Ape Man*  
*Voodoo Man*  
*The Corpse Vanishes*  
*The Mummy's Curse*  
*House of Frankenstein*  
*The Mysterious Doctor*  
*The Vampire's Ghost*  
*Jungle Captive*
- 1947:  
*The Mummy's Ghost*  
*The Mummy's Tomb*
- 1948:  
*House of Dracula*  
*Fall of the House of Usher*  
*Dead Men Walk*  
*The Monster Maker*  
*Tall, Dark & Gruesome*
- 1950:  
*Captive Wild Women*

Did Hollywood horror really come roaring back in 1939, or did it limp back, chastened and reformed? The new horrors were quite different than the old.

From February 1931 (the release of *Dracula*) until August 1936 (the release of *The Devil Doll*), Hollywood issued about 40 horror films. Many classics are among them, but more importantly a new mythology — a uniquely 20th century, Depression-era, American blend of European legends, literature and American fantasies — had been created. Writers of the day correctly speculated on the connection of the Great Depression and the popularity of horror films. The "monsters" in these 1930s films are readily identifiable as stereotypes of the exploited and the exploiter. The basic premise of these films is often innocent people in the grip of incomprehensible evil. Con-



temporary observers also correctly linked the new medium of sound films to horror — not because the horrors became more terrifying, but because they became more real.

1930s horror films are more than period curiosities today because they tapped deeper themes. As I have tried to show — as many writers before me have long noted — psychosexual themes lie at the very core of almost all these films, certainly all the classics. No other film genre addressed such themes; no other genre incorporated them as consistent basic elements. Thus, film censorship, particularly in post-Victorian Britain, targeted horror for scrutiny and control. Contemporary opponents of horror rightly pondered the cumulative effect of many such films. Horror legends, like traumatic experiences or nightmares, must be told and retold “until we get it right,” until the horror is resolved. At the core of classic horror are sexual fears, which take form in the “monsters” as thinly disguised perversions and dysfunctions. To paraphrase Twitchell — Dracula is unholy consummation; Frankenstein is unholy reproduction; the Werewolf (or Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde) is unholy pubescence; the Mummy is unholy abstinence. And somewhere in almost all these films are messages of sexual repression and denial, topics that certainly interest adolescent audiences. When the 1930s horror films again and again delved into these themes — made these themes a pervasive element of adolescent culture — reformers pounced on them.

No doubt many readers find my synopses of the seven horror films highlighted in this article slanted towards my thesis, stressing those psychosexual elements over a more objective summary of the plot. Perhaps — but try to do the same with any seven 1940s monster films. The victory of the reformers of 1936 was more complete than they knew. In the 1940s, American horror films largely lost their mythic quality, and devolved to simply monster stories. No sooner had the new wave of horror films produced a new classic (*Son of Frankenstein*) than it also introduced a new invention, the “scary comedy” — unheard of in the 1930s, but a staple of the 1940s. The Mummy and Frankenstein’s Monster became little more than robots.

Dracula still seduced women, but with brute force (Chaney, Jr.) or patrician charm (Carradine), not with the alien menace and decadence of Lugosi. Chaney and Carradine are undead, but not unholy. Lugosi’s one serious vampire of the 1940s (in *Return of the Vampire*) actually preys on a child victim, a la *Interview with the Vampire*. In the 1930s film makers would have woven a nightmare from that plot incident; in 1943 it was all but ignored. Only the most dedicated viewers are even aware of it.

Those exceptions of the 1940s that exist tend to prove the thesis. Val Lewton’s horror films at RKO certainly explored deeper themes, but with a literate good taste and noble ambition that bores most adolescent audiences. Lewton produced some of the finest horror films ever made, but there was never any reason to ban persons under 16 from them. The BBFC apparently agreed, and issued no “H” ratings to Lewton films (Lewton’s *Bedlam* was banned for its unfavorable depiction of 19th century British insane asylums). Except for Lewton, 1940s horror films are missed opportunities, juvenile entertainment degenerating to self-parody. At least the decade ended with that greatest of parodies, *Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein*.

The new cycle of horror films began with a true classic. *Son of Frankenstein* builds a fascinating triangle of strong characters (Frankenstein, Ygor and Krogh), each with a unique relationship with the Monster (“brother”/creator, friend/exploiter, victim/nemesis). The film was produced in late



The Mummy's Curse (1944).

1938, and is almost a throwback to the earlier 1930s. Yet it avoids themes its predecessors almost instinctively embraced. Of the first five films of the series, *Son of Frankenstein* is the only one in which the Monster never lays hands on, or even shares a scene with, a Frankenstein woman. And the film wastes no time in revising the past. Ygor tells us early on that Frankenstein was the monster’s father, and “his mother was the lightning”. Of course, in strictly biological terms, Frankenstein is the monster’s mother, and Henry Frankenstein as played by Colin Clive easily suggests a man, on the brink of his wedding night, with a real crisis in sexual identity. But starting with Ygor’s offhand comment, Universal steered its characters away from their dark motives of the 1930s.

The great monster of the 1940s was Lon Chaney’s Wolfman. Chaney is competent in *The Wolf Man*, but his tragic Lawrence Talbot in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* is brilliant. He is probably even more powerful in *House of Frankenstein*. His werewolf, however, is a mindless killing machine. In 1935, in *Werewolf of London*, the monster “instinctively seeks to kill the thing it loves best,” and thereby suggests any number of dark possibilities (which that film largely fails to exploit). Intentionally or not, Universal tapped into the core of the werewolf legend. Again, Twitchell puts it best:

“The werewolf of folklore, just like the vampire, is mandated to attack first those he loved most in life — usually members of his human family. This mandate is a key to understanding the psychodynamics of the myth, for it is clear the wolf acts out the once-repressed familial aggression, now safely protected by his furry disguise.”

Chaney’s werewolf could never achieve its full potential without this dimension. The familial element is included in *The Wolf Man* — Lawrence Talbot is returning home, after years of exile, brought back by the death of his brother. But the film soon abandons this interesting premise and gives us only a monster story. Universal had an opportunity to maintain the tension — simply make Maleva, the gypsy sage, a man rather than a woman. The result would have been a struggle between fathers (Maleva and John Talbot, Lawrence’s father) for the soul of an outcast son. Instead of a good monster movie, *The Wolf Man*

might have been a great horror film. Lugosi was on hand, and his Maleva would have been a classic role. Instead, Maria Ouspenskaya’s lethargic Maleva is the most overrated non-performance in horror history. Her deadpan Maleva hung on for the sequel, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, and halfway through that film simply drops out of the plot. By then no one noticed or cared.

What if the reformers and the censors of the early 1930s had ignored horror? Would the golden age of horror have been more golden? Would 1930s horror have avoided the pitfalls into which every horror film cycle since then has fallen? The answers are unknowable, but I think the golden age is as much dependent on the watchdogs as it is on the Great Depression or the coming of sound films. What makes these films unique is the tension between the film makers and the censors/reformers. A perusal of the original storylines for many of these films (as documented, for instance, in the books I have cited above) shows the writers and directors continually pushing for greater explicitness, both in the gore and violence on screen and the primal messages just beneath them. Always the censors — whether from the studios or the watchdog groups — held them back. The result was films often showing us little but always straining to show us more, to tell the secrets we are not quite old enough to know. What our parents shield from us is what we are most curious to see. The censors kept the dark secrets of the horror classics just beyond reach. Despite the new Code of 1934, the film makers continued to penetrate the protective veil. The censors and reformers then virtually destroyed the genre. Without them, however, the genre on its own might have become only gore fests or grotesque comedies — or, as with *Interview with the Vampire*, become so conscious of their themes and parade them before us with such heavy-handed repetition as to be boring.

Did the sexual undertones and themes of the 1930s horrors really figure in the outcry against them, or were the watchdogs merely protecting us from scary monsters? To the case presented above I can only add that “H” was not eliminated in 1951, but rather was promoted to an “X,” which means the same today that it meant 40 years ago. ■

# Can We Find Someone Small Enough To Fit Into This Rat Suit?

## On the set of *Attack Of The Sixty Foot Centerfold*

by Brad Linaweaver



J.J. North in an exciting scene from *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold*.

When producer/director Fred Olen Ray makes a movie to be released by producer/director Roger Corman, the results are sure to be interesting. For fans of *Cult Movies* there is every reason to hope for a movie that will satisfy modern audiences while fondly paying homage to the sort of films that were high points of our childhood. We're talking pictures about giants and monsters and mad scientists; we're talking about those wonderful posters from the fifties that always seemed to promise more than was actually delivered on the silver screen. What Fred Olen Ray has done with *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold* is to make a movie that delivers everything those old posters ever promised.

The story takes off from all those Bert I. Gordon films, especially Mr. BIG's duo about Glenn Manning, *The Amazing Colossal Man* and *War of the Colossal Beast* — even to the extent of naming a character after Manning. In recent years there has been a growing respect for these pictures despite all the *Golden Turkey* type books and *Mystery Science Theater 3000* sort of attention. Fred is the perfect filmmaker to pick up where Gordon left off. He considers the first half hour of *Colossal Man* to be suspenseful and effective, a sign that Gordon could have done much better work. One thing is for sure: the special effects deficiencies that so plagued Mr. BIG's explorations of the gigantic are nowhere to be seen in Ray's pictures. The effects are — no pun intended — just great.

Of course, the most obvious parallel to an old movie is a picture far worse than anything Gordon ever made, but which Roger Corman quite rightly identifies as “one of the great movie titles of all time” — *Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman*. The recent

remake couldn't help but be an improvement, but was stuck with the same fairly uninspired plot. *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold* not only has 10 feet on the other one (at Roger Corman's insistence) but a more humorous story, as well.

The night this reporter attended a shoot down on Hollywood Boulevard there was a general feeling of fun. Good natured parodies tap into a sense of humor on the part of participants.

For example, the star of the *Sixty Foot Centerfold*, J.J. North, a beautiful blonde who owns her own comics shop in New Jersey, easily slipped into the spirit of the production. As one of the Howard Stern girls (frequently appearing on his TV show and a model in his best-selling book, *Private Paris*) her natural irreverence came through loud and clear during a mini-interview. “I used to get turned down for certain modeling jobs in New York because I wasn't tall enough. Some of these New York agents are spoiled by high fashion. They want all the girls to be six feet or taller. Well, now I'm back and I'm 60 feet tall! Try and top that!” As to how she liked working with Fred, her reply was: “It's big, nothing less than big!”

J.J. plays the good girl, appropriately named Angel, who changes drastically as a result of a beauty treatment (Corman's *The Wasp Woman* buzzes to mind). Some of her best scenes are directly inspired by Gordon's *Colossal Man*, such as her living inside a circus tent or when she takes a stroll through the desert. She may also have the funniest line in Steve Armogida's tongue-in-cheek script, expressed to her boyfriend in a moment of pique: “I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself.”

Tammy Parks (veteran of *Playboy* videos) plays the bad girl, Betty. A stunning redhead, the big

difference between her character and J.J.'s is that she chooses to become a giantess whereas in J.J.'s case it's an accident, an unfortunate by-product of beauty treatments. As both girls are competitors for the Centerfold of the Year contest, Angel accidentally gets a leg up on the competition when she grows to 60 feet. Jay Richardson, doing a hilarious Hugh Hefner take-off, realizes the potential of leaving the girl at gargantuan size, even though a cure is possible. All Betty knows is that Angel will win the contest if she doesn't rise to the occasion. And the script gives the villainess some dialogue that can't be topped: “I'm a very shallow person.”

Interviewing Tammy on Hollywood Boulevard, this reporter was struck by the fact that she had good lines, just like J.J.! For instance: “It's fun, silly and campy — it's hard not to giggle when we cat fight. I love being a special effect.” In keeping with her role, she also said, “I'm going to win this contest. I'm definitely going to beat her.” As if bad guys ever win in a good, old fashioned monster movie! Besides, this reporter had read the script.

(Tammy had her moment of Bert I. Gordon homage when she extracts a giant tranquilizer dart from her leg and throws it at the Hefner character, bringing to mind the moment when Colonel Manning throws the giant hypodermic needle back at his tormentors, spearing the army doctor in the process.)

There is a third centerfold, the beautiful Raelyn Saalman, but she remains at normal size... in a manner of speaking. And cutie Debra Dare is a yummy nurse.

Although there are many good special effects sequences in this picture, the night filming on Hollywood Boulevard and Wilcox Avenue allowed for many shots that would eliminate the need for later optical work. By placing the actresses on raised platforms and having them wrestle, low angle camera shots gave them the proper titanic look and also captured memorable Hollywood landmarks, such as the Wax Museum, Fredericks and good old Cinema Collectors Bookstore! A small crowd of homeless people gathered to shout encouragement and enjoy the free show, inspiring Chris Olen Ray, son of the filmmaker and a production assistant, to comment, “Hollywood! It doesn't get any better than this.”

The rent-a-cops probably enjoyed the show as well, and who wouldn't get a kick out of watching J.J. and Tammy battling it out while dressed in tattered bed sheets? Well, “get a kick” is probably a bad choice of words, especially when crowds of extras are running for their lives, hoping not to be stepped on and crushed like tourists.

The climax in Hollywood allowed for plenty of the Fred Olen Ray trademark — lots of cameos! Forry Ackerman makes his forty-ninth cameo in *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold* in a role he has already made famous on television and National Public Radio and *Flying Saucers Over Hollywood*: Dr. Acula! Well, “Dracula” if you prefer, complete with original Lugosi cape! This is the first time he is credited as Dracula in a feature film. He plays a wax statue of Dracula standing in front of the Wax Museum along with Tony Lorea doing his patented Humphrey Bogart. So along comes the giant girls, stomping down the boulevard, sending





Stanley Livingston from *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold*.

frightened masses of teeming humanity spilling before them.... And what should happen but that wax statues of Dracula and Bogart come to life and run off with the crowd! Yes, it's that kind of movie.

Steve Barkett, who plays a cop in the film, had earlier cast Forry in what may be his best film role to date, the curator in *The Aftermath*. His comment on FJA's 49th time before the feature film cameras: "Nothing is greater than this aftermath of his career; and the next one is the Big 50." By the time this article sees print, Cthulhu only knows how many more pictures may be added to this list that Forry fans started compiling with *The Time Travelers* and *Queen of Blood*. For the record, *60 Foot Centerfold* is his fifth film for Fred Olen Ray, the other four being *Scalps*, *Beach Blanket Bloodbath*, *The Alien Within* and *Bikini Drive-in*.

A brief moment before the cameras can be quite addictive; and this reporter was grateful to do a scene with the mad scientist, or sane scientist perhaps, who invents the growth formula, Dr. Lindstrom, played by none other than John LaZar. Afterward, he said, "These are the largest women I've worked with since *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*!" An apt comment indeed from the actor who played Z-man, the villain in Russ Meyer's greatest film, and the most unforgettable script credit of Roger Ebert!

LaZar looked right at home brandishing the giant gas gun that finally shrinks the centerfolds back to size — and yet another reminder of the giant syringe in *The Amazing Colossal Man*. His earlier scenes in the lab are classic sci-fi and he seems to be enjoying the company of his colleague, played by Michelle Bauer, the *Scream Queen* most associated with Fred Olen Ray pictures. She looks just as good in a white lab coat as she would out of it. The third doctor is George Stover of *Female Trouble* fame with a round, expressive face just perfect for horror films.

A sub-plot that begins in the lab and scurries off is that the scientists first experiment on rats. For readers keeping score, we have another parallel to Mr. BIG, *The Food of the Gods*, except that these rats are much less disgusting in keeping with the humorous tone of *Sixty Foot Centerfold*. Only one character is badly frightened by them, allowing Peter Spellos (from *Dinosaur Island*, *Bikini Drive-in* and many others) to turn in one of his funniest performances as a professional rat killer complete with rat skin boots. Ray looked all over Hollywood before finding an actor small enough to fit into the rat suit — a famous little person who wished to remain anonymous.

Spellos is not the only member of the ensemble cast of Ray players who has a fine moment in what is basically a no-holds-barred comedy. Ross Hagen (Charlton Heston's gorilla jailer in *Planet of the*

*Apes*) is a truck driver who can't believe what he sees when Angel, in a truly impressive special effect, checks out his truck on her way into town. One of the nicest aspects of these effects is that you can see the centerfold's legs through car and truck windows when she walks past.

Stan Livingston ("Chip" from *My Three Sons*) has the honor of playing the character named after *The Amazing Colossal Man*, Glenn Manning; except that here the character is a reporter for one of the grocery store tabloids.



Fred Olen Ray

As Angel sneaks past him we have a moment of concern that he may miss out on the one story he won't have to make up. But never fear, he turns in his story with a title to make fans cheer: "War of the Colossal Centerfolds."

One of the biggest treats for movie fans is a perfect little scene with Russ Tamblyn of *Tom Thumb* and *War of the Gargantuas*, not to mention roles in everything from *West Side Story* to *Twin Peaks*. This is an actor who has done it all and knows all about the Super Tall and Ultra Small! He plays a crazy gas station attendant who thinks that he is in contact with aliens, just the sort of person to be interviewed by the reporter played by Livingston. Naturally this happens on the night when a certain very tall babe decides to take a stroll into town.

The town drunk (Jeff Murray) is thoughtful enough to give her a drink on the way. Ex-Disney star Tommy Kirk (who worked with Karloff and Rathbone in *Ghost in the Invisible Bikini*) makes an appearance. On the way she passes by the power towers from the Daryl Hannah remake of *Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman*! This movie is very much like cozying up to an old friend from drive-in movie monsters past.

On the last day of filming the picture, in a studio where they could do blue screen shots, the sense of fun was still palpable in the air, like a thin cloud of radiation altering the molecular structure of all living things! A number of heroic actions took place on this day. Steve Barkett, fulfilling his role as special effects supervisor, bravely volunteered to blow air through a plastic tube giving the illusion of inflating J.J.'s breasts beyond their already goddess-like proportions. This reporter bravely volunteered to be one of three stalwart men crouching down beside J.J., catching her as she fell over with no concern for personal safety; and willing to do this as many times as it took. A basic scientific law seems to be that as beautiful women grow or shrink, they faint a lot! Fred Olen Ray bravely smoked one of the cheap cigars the crew gave him as a joke, knowing full well his connoisseur taste for Havana tobacco.

Actor Ted Monte, playing Angel's real boyfriend (as opposed to the fake boyfriend, a slick and wonderfully insincere performance by Tim Abel) went through the blue screen shot several times where his hand would finally be matched up to J.J.'s titanic tit. And finally the production was over, with a bit of smoke and fire to be later added into the Hollywood Boulevard scene, with a laugh, and with Fred's final word on his curvaceous star: "The worst, cheesiest flash camera cannot take a bad picture of this woman!"

One way to sum up *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold* is to remember what Fred said about his previous project for Corman, *Dinosaur Island*: "It's going to be the movie every kid wished he'd seen when he was 14 years old."

Ari Bass, reporter for *Femme Fatales* who was also on the set, put it this way: "Men like 'em big." John LaZar's character, Dr. Lindstrom, has a line of dialogue that could be the coda of the picture: "Hell hath no fury like a sixty-foot woman."

But for this reporter, the one image of the film that really says it all is of Nikki Fritz, playing the jealous and crazed girlfriend of the Hugh Hefner character, as she chases men out the mansion with a screaming, buzzing chainsaw. A chainsaw? But of course! This is, after all, a Fred Olen Ray picture. ■



At right: Documentary filmmaker Ted Newsom (Ed Wood: *Look Back In Angora*) in *Sixty Foot Centerfold*.

# Fred Olen Ray Talks About Big Girls and Big Drive-Ins

Interview by Brad Linaweaver

**Cult Movies:** Fred, some of your most recent films seem to fit the idea of cult movies more than ever.

Fred Olen Ray: I don't deliberately set out to make a cult movie. I think that people who try to make a cult movie usually fail. It either happens or it doesn't happen. There are also different kinds of cults. I've been affected by the cults that have built up around B movies and B movie actors. I like to tap into that and use that as a springboard.

**CM:** You seem to find more old-time actors and character actors for your films than anyone else in the industry. Is that planned?

FOR: It's definitely on purpose. Lots of people want to work. The real troopers still enjoy getting in front of the camera. They want somebody to yell "Action," and be working again. A lot of these people have given me a lot of entertainment over the years. What may seem like just an old guy to someone else is a celebrity to me — someone who made a big impression on me as a kid, or as a teenager at a drive-in.

**CM:** That leads right into *Bikini Drive-In* where you used a wide variety of performers.

FOR: Well, we had Gordon Mitchell as Goliath, which I think is one of the best things we did in *Bikini Drive-In*. Having Dave Friedman and David Hewitt and Tony Cardoza and other people like that in the film was a real treat. They've done a lot toward shaping the films I make, and if you don't like what I'm doing, blame them! If you like what I'm doing, then hire them and put them in a movie.

We had the usual stock company of people I use. A good example was Steve Barkett as the Sheriff. And as long as we're talking cult movies, Conrad Brooks was in the film. I had met him at FANEX several times. I thought he was a sweet and gregarious guy, easy to like. I always wanted to do something with Conrad and *Bikini Drive-In* was a perfect opportunity. We needed someone to play the old projectionist who had been there since the place opened. Conrad kind of reminds me of a Mickey Rooney character and I thought he would be just right for the film.

**CM:** What can you tell us about the actresses in *Bikini Drive-In*?

FOR: We used a lot of girls we've never used before: Ashlie Rhey, Sarah Bellomo and our old stalwarts like Debbie Dutch, Nikki Fritz (who was in *Dinosaur Island*). I'd gotten to like Nikki and I wanted to see what she could do. I thought she was extremely good.

And, of course, Michelle Bauer who has really been at this for such a long time that I couldn't justify tossing her in as a Bikini girl so we made her the world's greatest Scream Queen; and we honored her in that way.

**CM:** In the post-Traci Lords period, more adult actresses seem to be crossing over into mainstream. Ginger Lynn seems to be doing this. And you had Barbara Dare in *Evil Toons*.

FOR: Barbara Dare, yes. Her name is actually Staci Mitnik, but she didn't want to use that name so she became Staci Nix. Madison Stone was in adult films but I didn't know about that. Barbara I did know about. I'd worked with people like that before, such as Raven who was in *Angel Eyes* that Gary Graver did. She was a very famous adult star.

About 50 percent of the time, some of these girls from the adult industry don't really want to work hard. I always wondered what kind of mentality is attracted to the adult film business — and I remember one of the girls, when we told her what Union scale was for the part, said she gets that in a day. But I said she doesn't have to take on the whole crew here! I said



J.J. North & extra Vanessa Koman in *Sixty Foot Centerfold*

this is what actors get. Some of those girls would want to come in late and want to leave early. They didn't want to really put in the long and hard hours that a regular film requires. They wanted to make a quick fifteen hundred dollars for getting on their hands and knees for a couple of hours. But then there are the ones who do want to act and will do the work required. And acting work is not nearly as dangerous.

**CM:** Is there more cross-over than there used to be?

FOR: No, not really, because there aren't adult stars now, not like there used to be. Traci Lords was the last one, and probably the first one, who really made it because she was so famous. Marilyn Chambers always gave it a good shot. Ginger Lynn Allen has given it the heave-ho, but she never really made it like Traci Lords made it in films.

The rest of the girls who are trying to cross over are just not really doing it. They're finding it's not really for them. Next to Scream Queens, adult stars are the easiest and quickest instant celebrity status that there is. But that fame doesn't go much further than the realm they're in.

**CM:** I thought Chambers turned in a good performance in Cronenberg's horror film, *Rabid*.

FOR: Yeah, she's OK, but I don't think she really had the body for it. She came along at an interesting time.... People are more aware of adult films now than they ever were before; and they're more accepted, maybe. They don't have the same stigma now as when Marilyn Chambers was trying to cross over. If she was around now and was trying it, and was as famous, she'd have a better go of it.

**CM:** Your biggest scenes in *Bikini Drive-In* were done the night of the earthquake, weren't they?

FOR: Which is why if you ask me, to this day, when is Martin Luther King's birthday, I can tell you: January 16th! (The filming continued into the wee hours of Jan. 17th.) I never could tell you that except that's

when the major earthquake hit and we were filming. We didn't feel the severity of the quake because the drive-in location was in El Monte (the same drive-in that was in Daryl Hannah's remake of *Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman*).

It was bad there, but it wasn't enough to make me panic. Not knowing the severity of the damage, I asked the crew to continue filming...at least five more set-ups, which was forty-five minutes to an hour. As this was my last night, I couldn't come back and needed certain things to make the film work. So we kept working; which some people may think was heartless or thoughtless, but we weren't really aware of the damage. We did know if we didn't finish that shoot we wouldn't be able to complete the movie.

**CM:** Nobody panicked there?

FOR: No. Not badly. Nothing really fell over. Some power transformers exploded around us. But our own lights stayed on so we continued to film. We weren't out of power. When we were finished, everyone tried to make their way home where we found everything to be in a terrible state.

**CM:** Cult movies are usually medium to low budget, aren't they — the kind of movies where there aren't many excuses to stop filming?

FOR: There is no sugar daddy, no big studios behind you to take up the slack later. It's a simple case of YOU MUST FINISH! That's part of being an independent filmmaker...because you are gambling. And in this case I was gambling a lot of my own money. There was no way I was leaving that drive-in with the job unfinished. We had to work fast. I cut some shots way down, as you see in the finished film. A girl goes from having her top off to having her top on with one cut-away. I couldn't justify taking any more time to keep shooting. But I did have to finish those shots necessary to complete the motion picture.

**CM:** I suppose any continuity problems could be explained as part of the complete artistic vision. How did the film do?

FOR: *Bikini Drive-In* is still in sales point — it's been out on the market since the American Film Market, and it's done very well. We spent a little more on that picture than the ones we made in Florida. We pay better here than we do in Florida — because we have crews here we work with on bigger budget shows; and we pay them the same. So we spent more to make basically the same amount of money we would have made on a cheaper picture. I directed it myself. I loved being there. I loved making the fake movie parodies and working with all the actors I enjoy. I put together a hell of a little gang of people.

**CM:** One imaginary movie playing on the screen in *Bikini Drive-In* consists of the test footage you made with Michelle Bauer that you used to sell Roger Corman on your doing *Attack of the Fifty Foot Centerfold*.

FOR: This was a natural project to interest Roger. He designed the original poster for *Attack of the Fifty Foot Woman*. It's even his title that he came up with for Larry Woolner. He insisted that the girl in my film have ten feet on the fifty foot woman!

Roger asked me to shoot two special effects sequences — one showing a giant girl inside somewhere and one of her outside. These test shots would help him make up his mind. I could only think of one beautiful girl who would do this for me for free, and that was Michelle. We're close friends. I knew she wouldn't be the centerfold and she was aware of that going in. So I was spending thousands of dollars making a special effects shot that wouldn't be used in the *Sixty Foot Centerfold* film. And I had to do it with my own money — that was part of the deal. Rather than lose the couple of thousand dollars and throw the shot away, it seemed very easy to insert it onto the drive-in screen for *Bikini Drive-In*. The test shots are perfect to use because Michelle plays a movie star, the



ultimate Scream Queen, making a personal appearance at the drive-in.

CM: How did you do such impressive effects shots? It's a case of: Bert I. Gordon, eat your heart out.

FOR: It's digital! My own crew kept asking me about this. They didn't see how this was going to work out. Certain digital tricks that had worked in *Dinosaur Island* gave me the idea of how it could be done. I followed my own intuition on how to set up the shots and how I wanted to proceed. It was a big risk because I couldn't composite them until after the movie had been finished; so I didn't know if I had it or not. I was a little nervous but, knock on wood, it did work out.

CM: In both the test footage and in the final version of *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold*, I was impressed by the way you could see the giant girl's legs through the windows of cars as they walk past.

FOR: You're cutting a series of hard mattes, just like Bert Gordon would have done in his time. Doing it digitally means you can run it back and forth until you get it just right. In the old days you cut the matte, ran it through the optical printer and, depending on how much money you had, you could do it a few more times if you didn't get it right. Now you can look at it every step of the way and see if it's working. We were able to put the girl's reflections in the windshield of the car. We were able to put a shadow on the girl of the guy who pops up between her breasts.

CM: That's with the star of *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold*?

FOR: Yes, J.J. North. The biggest star in Hollywood!

CM: Where did you do these effects?

FOR: We did the effects at the Post Group at MGM/Disney Studios in Orlando. They have these effects facilities at Disney and part of their thing, of course, is that at certain times they'll have a tour that comes through from the theme park and they can look through the windows — seeing into the bay where they can watch what work is being done in the studio. At first, I balked. I don't like being on display. It's not an art form. I'd rather not be in a room where people can look in on me.

Well, at one point some Disney officials walked through and saw the little guy jumping up from between J.J.'s giant breasts and... it was very icy. A big chill went across the room. I was almost expecting they were going to ask me to leave; but I'd paid them a lot of money in advance and I was determined it would be hard to get me out of there! It worked out but I don't know if they'd want me to come back. I think people will like what we did when they see the scene.

CM: Just as *Bikini Drive-In* has a lot of people from Hollywood history, so does *Sixty Foot Centerfold*.

FOR: *Sixty Foot Centerfold* has some of my standards; Michelle Bauer, Peter Spellos from *Sorority Massacre 2* and the *Hard to Die* movies, Jay Richardson who has been with us an awful long time. There's Nikki Fritz who has a pretty good part in this. Our guest star celebrities include the one and only Russ Tamblyn, Stan Livingston from *My Three Sons*, Tammy Kirk, who is just starting to emerge in a new career... and John LaZar from *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, and cult movie favorites. (Most people don't remember that Stan Livingston starred in Paul Bartel's *Private Parts*, one of the weirdest, kinkiest, strange murder films of all time.)

CM: How did you go about casting the scientists in *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold*?

FOR: John LaZar is the head scientist who develops the growth formula. George Stover is in it, from John Waters films. I wanted Michelle Bauer in the movie. She's far more than just a beautiful body; she's a great actress, as well. I figured in this one, let the girls be the girls, and let the actors and actresses act! It was nice to give Michelle a part where she could just act; and that didn't require nudity or for her to wield a chainsaw.

CM: How was it working with J.J. North as the good giant centerfold and Tammy Parks as the bad one?

FOR: I met J.J. on *Vampire Vixens from Venus* in New Jersey. They didn't have a professional still photogra-

pher. But it didn't seem to matter because no matter what photo they took of her or how they took it, the result was beautiful. And I said this girl is so gorgeous she can't take a bad photo. She seemed very pleasant and wanted to come to California. I promoted her to Concorde. They agreed she was what every good centerfold should look like. We were able to make the deal.

For the other giant centerfold, Tammy Parks was perfect because she looks wicked and evil and bad. While we realized later that she didn't have the experience we thought she had, she came off well.

Raelyn Sallman was a girl I'd seen in *Blonde Heaven*, the vampire movie Dave DeCoteau made with Julie Strain. I liked the fact she's the girl next door.

CM: She's the only centerfold who doesn't grow to giant size, isn't she?

FOR: That's right. She's the only one who doesn't grow. Raelyn came in with a blue plaid school girl short-pleated skirt and some thigh high white stockings, and that was it! As far as I was concerned, she was cast. She was just the cutest little thing and I wanted her in the film.



Conrad Brooks and Michelle Bauer in *Bikini Drive-In*.

CM: I noticed that in both *Bikini Drive-In* and *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold* that Forrest J Ackerman Makes cameo appearances. How many times has he appeared in your movies?

FOR: I've worked with Forry six times. Let me see: he was in *Scalps*, *Beach Blanket Bloodbath*, *Evil Spawn* (and he came back a year later and added to his role for the *Alien Within* version of that one); and then there's *Bikini Drive-In* and *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold*. So two of those times count as the same role, giving a total of five films. Forry is wonderful. It's like that cross-country tour where he offered to come to your house; it's like having Forry come visit on my movie set. I feel like the luckiest kid in the world.

CM: Some of your recent films tie in very well with the kind of drive-in monster movies that were always covered in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. And, of course, I've covered *Dinosaur Island* for the new FM.

FOR: Yeah, I think they would have been just great for the good old days of the drive-in. I've kind of wondered why I did those two pictures in a row. But I think it's because of how grim the two pictures are that I had made the previous year — *Possessed by the Night* and *Inner Sanctum 2*. They are very humorless pictures; I really didn't have a chance on those films to cut loose and really be me, because you know I'm not a very serious person, normally.

CM: Some people think your best work is comic.

FOR: I certainly have a sense of humor about these things. For a while, I was stuck in the erotic thriller rut. I didn't really enjoy them. I liked the money I was

making. In a way, doing *Bikini Drive-In* was a way to cut loose and get a little wilder. *Attack of the Sixty Foot Centerfold* was headed right for Corman's office; and I knew I'd have to answer to somebody there. But I was still able to inject my own weird brand of humor, like with the giant rat trap, a giant vibrator joke, the big thumb print, the big foot print.... We did a lot of crazy things in there that no one at Concorde was really expecting. I think they actually appreciated and enjoyed it.

CM: When I talk to performers or members of the crew who have worked with you, I'm often told that you are more easy going than many other directors they've worked with. Do you think that contributes to the sense of fun that comes across in these movies?

FOR: There is a certain power structure that has to be observed. I stick to that power structure... but beyond that, I don't promote myself as being better than any other crew person. I just happen to be in charge. That's the difference. I don't go at it with the idea that I'm there to have my vision created by a bunch of people who are going to snap to it when I raise my voice. I try to get what I need to get; what the investors are paying for. I try to hold the show together by having some kind of authority. But I try not to be demanding in a superior kind of way over my actors and crew. I don't want them to feel that they're working for me; I want them to feel that they're working with me!

CM: Any news on upcoming projects?

FOR: We're doing *Jack 'O-Lantern* down in Florida. And that's a movie you did an outline for, Brad. It was promoted very heavily on *The Phil Donahue Show* where I picked a girl, quite literally, off the street. The girls were auditioned on the air and I gave one of them a supporting part in the film. Linnea Quigley has agreed to go down to Florida and star in the picture. The director is Steve Latshaw. So that will be pretty interesting.

The *Donahue* show was a lot of fun. Brinke Stevens and I went to New York for it. Joe Bob Briggs, J.J. North and Barbara Feldon (the ringer of the group!) were all on it. It was a show about B movies. It was very positive and the girls handled themselves very well, and defended themselves, when they had to. We used the *Biohazard 2* monster suit. We had a lot of fun. We went from there to London where we did *The Word*, a popular show that comes on 11 Friday nights, on Channel 4. We discussed the possibility of doing a Fred Ray festival in London with a promoter there; where I'd bring some of the girls and myself over for a two day event.

And I should probably mention that I'm still continuing to do the side-show freak show, and there's a documentary coming out on that. We should probably mention *Weird Menace*, the 1930s horror pulp pastiche on which you were associate editor, and it's out there in select book stores. I'll be doing *Cyberzone* — about *Blade Runner*-like synthetic android hookers — and it's not a comedy!

CM: To wrap this up, would you like to say anything about *Cult Movies* and Cinema Collectors Book Store?

FOR: Only that a major portion of the fight between the giant girls takes place in front of Cinema Collectors Book Store on Wilcox Avenue at Sunset. What we discovered about shooting on Hollywood Boulevard is that most of the stores there wanted someone to grease their palms with a couple of hundred dollars to leave their neon lights on. We had already made a deal with the Wax Museum to film there. So I called Buddy Barnett and said, "Buddy, we're going to be on Wilcox that night. Will you please leave your interior lights on and your marquee lights on so we can film in front of your store?" In the film, Cinema Collectors looks like it's on Hollywood Boulevard! So a big portion of the climatic fight takes place in front of the home of *Cult Movies* magazine.

CM: Thanks, Fred. That sounds like the perfect way to end this interview.

Brad Linaweaver has written previously for *Cult Movies*. He is a member of *The Science Fiction Writers of America* and *The Horror Writers of America*. ■

# THE "NO GREATER SINS" OF CLAUDE ALEXANDER



From *The Road To Manhood* pitchbook.

## Interviewed by Mike Vraney Edited by Lisa Petrucci

Knowing Claude Alexander for almost 40 years has been to know first-hand the colorful history of the wacky world of exploitation motion pictures. This is especially true of the era of roadshowmen like "Alex" who criss-crossed America with their bizarre wares. These men filled drive-in theaters with their keen sense of unorthodox promotion and flair.

More important, it has been four decades of close friendship from one who was always there with advice and encouragement. He produced my film *The Naked Witch* when my career needed a jump start. He is one of a kind. An original. People used to refer to late Spring as the beginning of the "drive-in season." Well, Claude Alexander is a man for all seasons.

— Larry Buchanan, April 1995

Mike Vraney: I'd like to start at the beginning. How did you get into show business?

Claude Alexander: I'm a Virginian by birth, and moved to Ohio when I was 15. I was an orphan, and was bounced around from one aunt and uncle to another and ended up in Springfield, Ohio. How familiar are you with Kroger Babb?

MV: Very much so.

CA: Well, Kroger Babb was a hometown boy from Wilmington, Ohio just down the road. That was the base of the Checker organization, and back in those days Checker Warner was a big outfit that had maybe 150-200 theaters. Business was bad and they were just about bankrupt until Kroger Babb came along and saved their butts. So from that time on, Kroger could do no wrong with the owner, Phil Checker.

Kroger eventually left Checker's and made *Mom And Dad* and a bunch of other movies. Well, I had just gotten a divorce and was working for the gas company as a PR man. A friend of mine, Jack De Voss, had gone to work for Kroger and he was very happy with his job. Jack was out on the West Coast working as a zone manager in Portland, Seattle and Salt Lake City. When he came home to Ohio for Christmas I said to him, "Jack, give me a goddamn job on the road. I'm fed up with this town. All my buddies are married

and settled down, buying homes and I'm a member of the damn "lost legion" sitting in bars every night." So he gave me a job and I went with Kroger Babb, January 1, 1950.

I'll never forget, I was driving a beautiful car on my way to meet Jack De Voss, Kroger's representative in the South, and picked up a kid who was going to theologian college. During the drive, I'm telling this kid all these stories about who I supposedly am (when I was really flat broke.) I drop him off and check into a flop house. About nine that night there's a knock at my door and it's this kid, he left something in my car! Oh I was never so embarrassed in my life, lying to that kid like that! Well, I worked for Babb for a year and was promoted to advance man. As advance man, I'd go out and paper the town just like a circus was coming. I was promoting *Prince Of Peace* at the time down in the Bible Belt. Kroger's ads were no good or it was the picture, and I didn't know anything about selling motion pictures, but I was willing to learn. I would go into a town and sit down with the owner of the house and we'd decide on the advertising. Since it was considered a very prestigious picture in the Southeast, we would get the best church in town for a screening, and invite all the media to make it a really high profile event. Everybody was willing to cooperate with you because the picture was really uplifting. So it was my job to put all this together.

MV: Did Kroger have a pitch for that film? What was he selling for *Prince Of Peace*?

CA: Kroger was a merchandiser. He sold something with any picture he ever made! *Prince Of Peace* was originally titled *The Lawton Story*. A minister started an Easter pageant in Lawton, Oklahoma, it was a big deal and people from all over the world would go to see it. *Prince Of Peace* was a story about that pageant, Kroger filmed it and concocted a story to go around the event. Hell, he had half of Hollywood there for the world premiere! The first day they were turning them away and on the second the manager and doorman were playing pinocle! Kroger was in trouble at the time because *Mom And Dad* had made him all that dough and now he'd gotten a little bit highbrow, figuring that he didn't have to stoop that low to make money and could compete with the majors. Well Kroger couldn't compete and as a result the whole damn outfit went down the drain.

Getting back to *Prince Of Peace*, we sold a little religious book, and I even made the pitch a few times. The little book was about a reverend who started with nothing and built this pageant into a world renowned event. It related incidents of how God had been good to them, but they still needed money so they were selling this beautiful little book. We would ask for contributions towards "the cause" and you could receive one of the books. I'll never forget, I had just taken a job and didn't know tickets came in rolls. Jack had left and I was promoted to zone manager for North and South Carolina and some pieces of Georgia, District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland. I can't even talk in the vernacular, and don't know what they're saying half the time. *Prince Of Peace* wasn't doing much business, so I decided to take some other people's ads and cut and paste them into my own copy. One night somewhere in South Carolina, I'm talking to an advertising director whose father owned a circuit. He said that the advertising wasn't very good on this picture and that we didn't have a good campaign, and I said "You're telling me! I want you to look at a couple of ads I pasted up. There's something I could sink my teeth into!" So, we got an artist and typesetter and came up with a beautiful color ad. And this time we opened the picture and they nearly tore the joint down! But I couldn't let Kroger know that I did this; you couldn't change a comma of his copy!

After I was promoted I handled five routes and there was a unit with each film which included the zone manager to book the dates, the advance man to promote and get things ready to open and then the unit comes along to play the picture.



MV: Did most units have someone who sold books?

CA: Yeah and a pageant girl. She was dressed in a beautiful gown and acted all sanctimonious. Usually the couple wasn't married and were sleeping together. Once we had a holdover and opened in another town in the mountains. The unit didn't know what to do because they didn't have anyone to do the book pitch so I said I'd do the lecture and stayed up half the night practicing. Well, this old lady from the hills came to the picture, she'd never seen a motion picture before and was extremely religious. When the picture started she couldn't believe her eyes — she's seeing Christ in full color right in front of her! She started crying and yelling Hallelujah! While I'm on the stage during the break making my spiel, her two sons are half carrying her out in the lobby, and she breaks away from them and takes me in her arms, kissing and blessing me saying "God Bless You" and that she'd see me in heaven! I felt so guilty, I'm not a religious guy! I wasn't really a showbiz type, just a working boy and to me every human being was somebody. I didn't look down on the audience like some of these other guys did. I respected everybody and was honest. This helped me because the scheisters who were constantly screwing each other saw the kind of guy I was and knew they could trust me.

Years later I ran into Andy Deits at the Kansas Independent Theaters convention and he invited me to lunch. I mentioned that I had worked for Kroger Babb and had taken *Prince Of Peace* on the road. He told me that he had just bought the picture and was planning a new campaign and I said to him that the last I'd heard, there was a \$50,000 lien against the film negative. Had he checked with the lab to make sure that printing was available? Andy checked and ended up having to cough up the money to get the picture, but luckily he talked a group into investing in it. I'm telling you, if you don't have all the information you can get into a lot of trouble with film.

Well, Kroger promoted me again because business went up. I told him I was unhappy down in the South and that I was in love with a girl in Ohio. I told him I might quit. He said "Don't do that, what do you want?" I asked him to transfer me back to the home territory. He said, "Don't tell anybody that I spoke to you or that I had anything to do with this, but I'll get you transferred." I was transferred to Pennsylvania and it was the worst thing that ever happened because the two zone managers before me were lousy and the picture had a terrible reputation and hadn't done any business. I had a hell of a time getting dates. The first guy I called on was in Pittsburgh. I was so damn poor, I was taking long steps to save shoe leather. I got to Pittsburgh, a country boy in a big town. I didn't have any money, but I had a Buick Riviera. I planned to check in at the YMCA, so I walked into the building, threw my bags down and asked for a room. Several girls start giggling and the girl at the desk said "I think you're in the wrong place." I said "What do you mean?" And she told me that I was at the YWCA for women! I hadn't noticed the letter W was burned out on the sign out front, so



I said to her "Looks to me like I'm in the right place!" Anyway, my first call in Pennsylvania was Greensburgh and I was given all these new contracts to sell pictures that I couldn't figure out.

MV: Were you only selling *Prince Of Peace* at the time?

CA: We were cleaning up on anything we could get with *Mom And Dad*. I got to Greensburgh, looked at my exhibitor inquiries, and called on a buyer. I was cooling my heels waiting to talk to him and brushing up on things so I sound like I know what I'm doing. I walked right up to him and said, "I'm one hell of a promoter, but that organization I'm with is moving so fast that one day you're the janitor and the next day you're vice president. I've gotten a bit ahead of myself and have been promoted to this job, but I can't read these contracts. If you help me with them and book this picture, I'll see that it makes a mint for you." So, he asked me to go to Pittsburgh with him where he'd introduce me to everyone and help me get started. He did and it was a great boost for me. One time, I was so dumb that I went to the distribution office at Warner Brothers trying to sell them a picture, and was told I was in the wrong place — they were selling pictures, not buying them!

Well, Kroger finished *One Too Many* and the

Checker organization had money in hallmark. I knew Phil Checker, he was like Santa Claus to me. When I was a kid working in his shop in Springfield before the war, I'd stand in my overalls in front of the Regent Theater where his chauffeur would bring him to his offices. The day came when he and I were old buddies, playing pinocle on Saturday nights together. We'd walk around like Mutt and Jeff! He was a great philanthropist and gave money to everybody. One year Phil was "Show Business' Man of the Year" worldwide. I worked my tail off for him and didn't do too well because the territory was ruined way before I got there. They were making *One Too Many* and I was in charge of the world premiere in Hamilton, Ohio. I was the one who went in and set up the whole promotion for the kick off. It flopped.

MV: What was the gimmick for *One Too Many*?

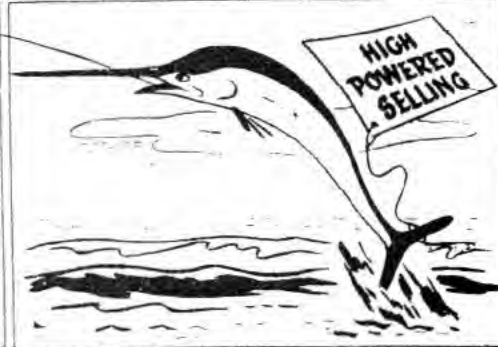
CA: We sold a book on alcoholism. By then, Kroger had a formula. We'd advertise in all the local papers, dailies, weeklies and radio stations figuring that you'd play to 15% of that area. And then you'd take the theater house, if it has 500 seats you'd see how many days you should book the picture to accommodate that many people. Then you'd figure how much that would bring in and spend 15% on advertising. When I went in to do the premiere of *One Too Many* nobody was sold on the picture. An outfit out of Cincinnati owned this theater, so I went in to do the campaign. The owner turned purple when I told him how much money it would cost to do advertising! He said that he couldn't afford it, that the theater didn't do that kind of business and the picture couldn't do it either.

Well, Kroger had these inflexible rules, and I didn't know what to do. He would say, "If you fill the house that first night you've done your job." So it was up to me to lay out a campaign with the little money this guy had to spare. We ended up filling the house for two nights and that was it. Kroger had this newsletter that went out once a week to all his employees on the road. We were all hungry and living in cheap hotels waiting for his next picture to get things going again. And then *One Too Many* flopped. He had to have someone to blame, so he blamed me.

A big convention was coming up in Cincinnati where people came in for seminars. I was dating his secretary at the time and she told me that I was going to be the fall guy, so I got a rebuttal ready for him. Kroger got up at the convention and covered all sorts of business and then got to the new productions. *One Too Many* had just been premiered and within 30 days the employees would have prints and could start booking it. The picture was a flop, so how was he going to handle the road personnel? He got up and laid me out, "We have a young man in the organization who thinks he knows more than Mr. Babb." Kroger told everybody how I completely left the formula and as a result the film flopped. I got up there and told him my side of the story — how he wanted the house to spend \$5,000 and they could only afford \$1,500. I went on, "You always said if you fill the house the first night you've done your job." Well I

(continued)

## KROGER NEVER LETS *THIS* BIG ONE GET AWAY ...



# I'M KITTY

I, too, contributed  
to the tragedy!

VIOLENT, SHOCKING AND  
ENGROSSING... CONVINCING  
PROOF... IT CAN HAPPEN  
HERE — TO YOU!

JAMES M. DOANE  
*presents*

# STREET CORNER

Produced by  
GEORGE McCALL

Directed by ALBERT KELLEY

Written by JACK JUNGMEYER and EDWIN ROTH

NO PRETENSE... JUST FACTS  
... IT SCORCHES THE SCREEN!

SEGREGATED AUDIENCES

WOMEN 2-7 P.M. • MEN 9 P.M.

NO CHILDREN UNDER HIGH SCHOOL AGE

ON STAGE • IN PERSON  
**CURTIS  
HAYES**  
RADIO HYGIENE COMMENTATOR

NURSES IN ATTENDANCE ALL SHOWS!

filled it two nights and then the damn picture fell flat on it's nose! After I finished I announced my resignation to take effect immediately. Everybody said, "Are you crazy? You don't take on Kroger Babb like that! You'll never get another job!" But I already had another job, that's why I was so cocky. Howard Underwood, who taught Kroger everything he knew about roadshowing, had already hired me. Howard was the biggest bulcrapper I've ever met in my whole life, bar none.

MV: Where was he out of?

CA: Lexington, Kentucky. I called Howard and talked to him. He hated Kroger and invited me down to visit. I went to his beautiful thoroughbred farm, he saddled up two horses and we rode out among the horses. I felt like I was on top of the world. He had a picture called *Lonesome Road* which had done a ton of business, but he only had two prints of it. He wasn't much of a businessman and was flaky, I told him that I was fed up with Kroger, he had nothing on the agenda that was going to make a quarter, so I wanted to leave. Howard had been off the road and his picture had been canned up for a year or so while he focused on thoroughbred racing. Well, he made me a hell of a deal. Howard wanted me to reopen all of his offices across the country. I would have to hire personnel for every exchange and he had me walking that high off the floor. I was going to head his organization while he took care of the horses.

MV: I'm not familiar with *Lonesome Road*.

CA: That was the biggest film I was connected with next to *Mom And Dad*. It was from the 1930s, but *Lonesome Road* was a title and a campaign he would splice onto whatever films he happened to have. For instance, I went to Philadelphia and they wanted to show the picture in eight drive-in theaters, but I only had one print. So I just had a bunch of titles run off and went down to the film exchange and got any pictures they had in mothballs and put new titles on them. In

one town it was a sex picture and in another a cowboy picture, I wasn't going to pass up those dates!

MV: So, Underwood had one film and you were going to open up all his theaters?

CA: I found out that Howard had made a states rights deal for a picture that Leon Ames was in, but I forget the name of it. He titled it *Lonesome Road* and was selling books and lecturing with it. He had a birth reel that went along with it, but it wasn't a film. Instead, he brought in a slide projector and showed birth slides on the screen. Howard murdered the English language but could charm the pants off anybody. I agreed to open the whole country and he would give me 50% of everything it took in.

I took it to Charlotte, North Carolina where I had been quite a lot for Kroger as it was one of my exchanges. I wanted to go where they knew that I was a good, hard worker and could make money with whatever they showed. They planned to book *Lonesome Road* and asked me about the film. I gave them a little synopsis and the guy tells me it's actually another film. He said Underwood didn't own the picture — he was bootlegging it! I was told an outfit in New York owned it and that Jake Aaronsen owned it locally. Howard sent me to sell bootleg pictures for him! That's when I decided to go out on my own.

The buyer called up Jake for me. Jake was a very successful man, he was the only Jew I ever heard with a Southern accent, and boy he was something else. Jake invited me to his house and knew of me because I had been out in that territory with Kroger's pictures. He said, "You're a hard working man, why would you want to work for that S.O.B.? He just steals everybody else's pictures and changes the title!" I didn't know how these kind of people operated, I thought everything was legitimate. Jake said that he had states rights for North and South Carolina and would call New York to see if there was any territory left for that picture. I could make a deal with them and

be on my own. They asked when I could be in New York and I said the next morning, so I drove all night. We made a deal and I think the film was actually called *Sins Of The Fathers* but I changed the title to *No Greater Sin*. That was the picture that made me millions, and the only big thing I ever had in my life.

MV: What year was that?

CA: That would have to be 1951. All I had was \$500, so when I talked to the guy in New York, I really laid it on telling him what a hardworking guy I was and if he'd have some confidence in me and let me take the picture out on the road he wouldn't be sorry. I even talked him into letting me keep my \$500 to operate with. He gave me the picture and a couple of old prints that I had to revitalize and patch up. They were nitrate prints and half the operators didn't want to run them. I took the film, put a big campaign on it, *No Greater Sin* and *The Miracle Of Birth*. Jake gave me some birth pictures and I used an old medical reel — what you sell is the childbirth.

The deal I worked out was that I sent in 40% of what came in, but not my pitch book money, and we sold those books like crazy. After I was on my own, worked out the kinks, shaped my operation and got some money, I set over 200 all-time box office records with the picture. At the time I was given Indiana and Ohio, this guy wasn't going to tie up much territory with a guy who was broke until he saw how I operated. I got my first play date all together and worked up a good ad campaign for *No Greater Sin*. It was booked in Indiana and my old medical reel was falling apart. I had also bought some books from a roadshowman. To get started I sent out 25,000 mail pieces that the theater owner didn't even know about and covered everything around there. When the sun started to go down that night people began to converge on that joint and filled it right up! The highway was blocked like this was the most fabulous thing to hit a screen, with all my bullshit about how 40,000 people stood in the rain to see it in Detroit, and how it went four weeks in Cleveland, all that kind of stuff. The place was filled and I said to my friend Hank, "We better get near the exit because when this crap hits the screen I don't know how they're going to

can  
you  
talk  
to  
your  
children?

can you speak to  
them frankly  
of the problems  
that face them?

FIRST TIME ON THE SCREEN

**sins of the  
FATHERS**

added public service

**SEX HYGIENE COMMENTATOR**  
in person at all performances  
nurses in attendance



react!" Well the audience loved it and bought books, we ran out of books on the third night.

After I got successful with *No Greater Sin*, I was offered more territory and ended up buying the damn picture. As I became more enlightened with how things operated, I realized that I was giving the New York outfit too much of the money I made. The picture wasn't bringing in the money, it was my medical reel and the promotion that did it all. So I became dissatisfied and stopped sending in reports because I'd already sent them more money than they'd made in the previous five years. When I decided to buy the picture, I learned that it had been made by University Pictures and the producer was retired and living in France. A girl by the name of Ann Harvke was his Girl Friday in New York and handled all his local business, which wasn't much. When I was franchising the picture, I got it through an outfit she had worked with. I spoke to her on the phone and said I'd like to buy the picture. I told her that I couldn't get any dates because it was an old picture and wouldn't stand on its own. I wanted to put together an all-night show, back then it became popular to run films all night at the drive-in on Saturday nights. Everybody would neck and eat popcorn. This was great for the exhibitor because he could feed everybody and that's where the money was anyway. So I wanted to buy the picture, but I couldn't pay much for it. Meanwhile, I had already made about \$100,000, and had reported the first \$50,000 in. She and I made a deal, but I had to negotiate with a big law firm in New York that coordinated Hollywood with the rest of the world, making deals and all.

By the time I finished wading through all bureaucracy, I had an inferiority complex. I met with the head of the firm, started out dumber than hell and ended up sharper than he was and got the picture free. One of the last details was that the contract wouldn't become valid until all moneys owed to the producer by the distributor have been paid in full, and any money forwarded by the distributor to the producer under the old contract that have not been recouped would be deducted from the price of the picture. This floored me because I owed them about \$40,000 and that's what they wanted for the picture in perpetuity.

I went home waiting for the contract to come because I figure he's going to leave out that clause because he figures they owe me money that I advanced them. I had given them advance money and quit sending them reports before I had recouped it all, or at least they thought so. When I received the contract there was nothing about recouping money so I took the money that I owed the outfit and paid for the picture. I got the damn thing free! And it was the best deal I ever made in my life. The picture was now mine and I could improve and put money back into it. I collected film footage from pharmaceutical companies of childbirths, breach births, caesarians, circumcisions, training doctors with rubber anatomical mannequins, all in color. I went to New York with a smart fellow I had hired, Johnny Rickert, and made a hell of a medical picture with all this stuff.

MV: Did you ever go to Dwain Esper to get any footage? I had heard that you and John went to Dwain and bought footage of a birth of triplets by caesarian.

CA: That's right. Dwain Esper was as crooked as can be. The first time I ever met Dwain was after Kroger Babb's organization had disintegrated and I was going on with *No Greater Sin* breaking house records. All these wise guys who had been my superiors at Kroger's were all writing to me now for jobs. I had heard rumors that Dwain had some beautiful childbirth pictures in color including a birth of triplets. I was in Chicago and he had these old burlesque houses, you never saw a crummiest outfit than those theaters. Dwain had everyone from the janitor's to the comedians' wives in the chorus. Some old, some young, some fat, and they were the chorus girls! There was this guy who looked like he was in the Mafia, who I asked where Dwain Esper was and he says who's asking. Finally he told me that Dwain was out of town at his home in Scottsdale. He referred me to a woman who might give me his phone number. This gal and I ended up becoming great friends, she

**BANISH YOUR  
SECRET FEARS...  
SEE THE FACTS  
OF LIFE!**

*Because of  
EVE*  
...The Story of LIFE!

Segregated audiences  
**WOMEN ONLY**  
at 2 p.m.-7 p.m.  
**MEN ONLY**  
at 9 p.m.  
High school age and over  
**NURSES IN ATTENDANCE** all shows

**ON STAGE**  
in person  
**MR. ALEXANDER LEEDS**  
famed hygiene commentator

had a publishing house in Chicago, published books for Esper and then mine by the millions. I didn't have very much invested in my products, so I gave my people 60% of everything they took in for *No Greater Sin*. I had people making \$2-3,000 a week where the majors were lucky to pay \$200 a week and an expense account. This gal, Freda Fenster, gave me Esper's phone number.

Another time, Jack Thomas, a former associate of Kroger's, was showing me around and introducing me to people in Los Angeles and took me to Dan Sonney's office and Dwain Esper was there. I began talking to him about birth pictures and he said "I've got the greatest birth reel in color ever made." So I made arrangements to meet him the next morning at Paramount. Before I left Dan said to me "That's the crookedest son of a bitch that ever walked. When he dies they're going to have to screw him down into the ground. Don't you ever get involved with him because you'll lose!" Anyway, I was to meet him at Pathe Laboratories and he calls from New York and tells me that he can't make it.

I had his phone number for a long time before I eventually called again and asked about his medical pictures and told him I was interested. He asked me to come out to Scottsdale where he was in retirement and was lonesome to talk about all the old days on the road. I ended up spending a week with him. He was married to an ex-actress named Hildegard. By then I had heard from coast to coast how crooked he was. John Rickert came with me and we watched Dwain drink a fifth of scotch every night. Dwain was being difficult about one point of the deal we had come to agree on and I told him that I had to leave that night

and wanted to wrap things up. I said to John, "He'll be drunker than a monkey, so when we get to this one paragraph change this one word and everything is changed in our favor when you write up the contract." That goddamn Dwain, as drunk as he was, when he was handed the contract, read it quickly until he got to that one part, took his pencil and rewrote the part I didn't want in there and signed it. He cheated me on that deal and sold me duped footage that was supposed to be the original print. When I found out from the lab that it was duped film, I refused to pay what I owed him.

MV: What kind of money was that medical footage going for?

CA: I think I gave him \$5,000. Then he tried to get an order to stop my picture, sent me registered letters and I wouldn't accept them. I had a lot of money invested in the picture and he threatened to stop my showing it. I just wouldn't negotiate or talk with him.

Finally, we had driven out to California and stopped in Scottsdale to settle this thing. I called Esper and scheduled a meeting with him at his lawyer's office. I needed a lawyer if I was going to face him and remembered that the YMCA had one so I called him to represent me. We met and made an agreement. My lawyer told me to pay Dwain and fulfill my end of the contract then we would sue him because he sold me a bogus property. I walked back in and paid him, Dwain thought everything was fine and invited me back to his house. I told him like hell we were. He grabbed my luggage and wouldn't give it to me so I ended up going with him.

We spent a few days together, he ran around with millionaires and knew them all. We went to Goldwater's for lunch and everybody knew him, they're sending drink over and I don't really drink so I'm pushing mine over to him and he's drinking them. The guy won me over in the next few days, he was a character and always remained my friend after that, calling me often until he died. I liked him, most crooks are charming. You've got a different kind of crook in Texas, they're polite, bow deeply and tip their hat then screw the hell out of you, always making it look on the up and up. I lost more money in Texas than any state in the Union. Well, Dwain and I straightened everything out and I made my picture better. I expanded my organization, had John and five other guys on the road and *No Greater Sin* was out-grossing everything else.

MV: Did you have *Streets Of Sin* during that period?

CA: Probably. I used to re-title *No Greater Sin* all the time. I only had one picture, so in good situations I'd change the title and show the picture six months later and the house would fill up again. I never heard a single complaint. When I first went into business I played a date in Ohio where there were two drive-ins and this guy booked them at the close of the season. The pictures did good, but not sensational business. The next Spring, I went to his office in Cleveland and had the same picture with a new campaign and title. He looked at it and thought it would do some business, not even screening the picture. He booked it in his two drive-ins and said, "That sure was a stinker you had last year, I'm glad we had the whole winter to blow the stink out of that place!" The next time the same exact picture took off and he held them over twice. When I went to pick up my check he says to me, "Now you've got a picture!"

MV: So many of the men you've mentioned are long gone and there's very few of you left. You've said things about Kroger Babb and Dwain Esper that really capture their personalities. Had you spent much time with Kroger when you worked for him?

CA: When I had the home office territory I saw him a lot. He became very distant with me after I walked. Years later I flew to Dallas to meet my representative down there, Bob Hargrove. He took me to the hotel and told me that Kroger was having a bunch of local showpeople in his room and that it might be a good time for Kroger and I to make up and let bygones be bygones. I agreed and did it. Kroger was very friendly and we ended up going to dinner with Larry Buchanan. We recaptured the years and Kroger

(continued)

said some very flattering things to me that night.

When I first met him I never would have thought we'd be on an equal level. I can remember when the first 40 pages of *Box Office* would all be Kroger Babb ads, stories and features, he was bigger than life. In the end poor Kroger wanted to go to work for me. I've got the letters verifying what I'm telling you. I was the first guy that Kroger ever hired who advanced to the level I did without a showbiz background.

MV: Did you know Dave Friedman?

CA: I never knew Dave very well, we were adversaries of sorts and both grabbing everything we could get across the country, neither one of us was pulling any punches. Dave was heavy competition in those days. After the Kansas censor board changed their position towards these kind of pictures in the fifties, I got *No Greater Sin* booked down there. They had never even heard of a hygiene picture. When it opened in Wichita the audience nearly tore the joint down. We held *No Greater Sin* over three times and I wanted the other exhibitors down there to know how well it was doing so they'd book it themselves. The problem was that I only had two prints in Kansas and this tied up my playdate schedule. An exhibitor would have to wait a few weeks to show the picture and this left just enough time for the opposition, one of whom was Dave, to move in.

MV: Dave was peddling *Street Corner, Mom And Dad, Bob And Sally*, and *Because Of Eve* for Kroger Babb back then. I got the 35mm negative to *Because Of Eve* and was really surprised that it showed male and female full frontal nudity. I called Dave after seeing it and mentioned it was a lot more explicit than I'd imagined. He said that out of all four childbirth pictures, *Because Of Eve* was the only one the Catholic Legion of Decency never saw, so it didn't get condemned.

CA: I never saw that version. I'll tell you one thing, the guy who was handling *Because Of Eve* in Virginia had an "in" somehow because they had a strict censor board that turned my picture down and passed *Because Of Eve*. There were three old ladies whose husbands had been in politics and passed on, leaving their wives on the censor board. I asked them to explain why they turned down my childbirth picture and they agreed to see it again. Well, the censor board projectionist didn't like these ladies (and they didn't like him) so I asked him to take the birth scenes out of *Because Of Eve* and put them in my picture. The movie was re-screened and they still vetoed it. I said to them, "My roots are in Virginia, my grandparents and their parents, I just don't understand why you're discriminating against me." They said that they weren't, then I told them I took the scenes out of *Because Of Eve*, a picture they had already passed. *No Greater Sin* never got passed by the censor board until the doors got kicked down!

Censorship was a hot topic in the papers. When I had submitted *No Greater Sin* to the Kansas Censor board before they changed their position they seemed ambivalent about it. The woman who headed the board asked if I could wait for their decision. After the picture was screened, I saw the woman outside the building, it was a rainy night so I offered her a ride. She got in and thanked me, then I asked her to dinner where I then asked her to find it in her consciousness to pass my picture. I told her that I would handle it strictly as an educational picture, appealing to a responsible audience and not exploit it in a cheap manner. The next day she passed it, and ironically the laws changed a few weeks later.

There was the time when I took *Bob And Sally* on the road. I was down and out, had just gotten married and couldn't sell a date for the film. We went to the Ashmen Brothers in Caro, Michigan. My baby daughter was sick and it was hot and humid as hell, so the Eshmans were up at the lake on their yacht. Back at the hotel, I told my wife that no one was going to buy the film, but I still tried to sell them on the picture. They asked me how long it would take me to do a campaign, and then asked if I could open a date in Bay City and Saginaw in July. I didn't have anything booked, but I acted like I had a hit picture on my hands and settled the date. I opened big and had rewritten the campaign without realizing how I had

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MEN—9 P.M.

worded it, and the audience was very mixed — black and white. The ad copy read "Deals with one of the great social problems of our time," which meant social diseases, but the black community thought it was a racial picture!

Anyway, the drive-in was full. A highway patrolman who was handling traffic handed me a business card and told me to call this man who turned out to be Carl Berman of the Theater Owners of Michigan. I knew he was someone big, and the cop said that this man was on his way to one of his theaters, got caught in the traffic jam and was impressed by the crowd. I went to Detroit to see Berman and he gave me a couple of dates. Overnight I went from a guy with \$90 in his pocket to a guy with wads of money!

After I had left Kroger I went with Irving Joseph, who had *Because Of Eve*. He offered 40% of the picture if I'd work New England. At that time I was in transition so it was a deal. Nobody could get into New England with *Because Of Eve* because it was on the condemned list and the Catholic Church has real pull up there.

I took New England because I had worked that Mafia picture *Bob And Sally* up there. I had no idea the Mafia was involved with that picture because it came from film people at Universal, at the time we had agreed upon a fifty-fifty deal so I redid *Bob And Sally* and it really took off. I left that outfit and took *Because Of Eve* to New England. I'd been playing *Bob And Sally* at Warner Brothers Theaters all over Pennsylvania and around and had been asked to take it up to New England, but took *Because Of Eve* instead.

Word got around that I could come into town the day before a show and sell out on opening day. Kroger and his people would start advertising 10 days in advance, running teasers to build things up.

Their opposition would call me and ask if I could get in ahead of them to set up a campaign. I'd go and spend all their money on advertising, then hit with a huge ad for the opening saying things like "Hollywood's newest and finest sex educational film, nothing held back!" Well, the competition is dead on opening night because everyone is in my theater. Even Kroger's people wanted to switch and come over to me! But I never took anyone else's people.

They wondered how I planned to get into New England. I knew that the church had to get organized before they could do anything about the picture, so I would go into town without a hint of the picture until the day before we open and run a half page ad before anyone can say anything. I opened a town in Connecticut where the downtown theater hadn't been doing much business. I'll never forget we had to turn them away when the picture opened. The main office thought we had made a mistake with the box office total, they couldn't believe it. I was in Boston, the home office of the New England theaters that were Warner's competition, and ended up switching to them because I was tired of screwing around with Warner's. I cleaned up in New England and overnight I'm Irving Joseph's boy!

I used to fight with these guys because I was square with everybody. There was Vance Swartz who was quite a charmer and had a small chain of theaters. I started running around with him and whenever we'd travel with *Bob And Sally* or go to the Universal exchanges everyone would shudder. I knew he was somebody, but couldn't figure where he stood. When Universal opened *Steel Town* in Detroit I went with him to the premiere. He had a hospitality suite that didn't quit and the Universal people were paying a lot of attention to him.

MV: So was he a Mafia guy?

CA: I never did find out. After I left, Vance made a deal with me for *Bob And Sally* and gave me several Midwestern states. Ted Mendelson, an ex-Universal man, had set up a booking agency in Indianapolis and gave me two of the best drive-in theaters in town. I booked the film two weeks before the Indy 500, I loved the races and would go for the qualifying everyday. Come Saturday night cars are parked all the way down the highway for the picture. Ted asked me where I was all day, was I bootlegging the picture? He asked if I'd heard of the Fox Brothers out of Washington from the Motion Picture Litigation. Well he tells me that they're in the hotel and have got an action against me. I showed him the contract between Vance and myself giving me exclusive distribution rights in Indiana, Ohio and those states. He was relieved and the picture opened as scheduled. The men still said they planned to take over the box office until I showed them the contract and they didn't say a word after that.

Come to find out, Irving Joseph had started the action against me because he had the picture in his package and hadn't been told that Vance had made a prior contract with me for certain territories. Irv and I had been good friends and now he's on the phone cussing me out for supposedly bootlegging. I had all kinds of damn trouble.

MV: Those are the best stories, hearing how you all dealt with each other.

CA: In Pottsville, Pennsylvania one of the heavy Mafia boys lived there and owned a drive-in. I didn't know he was Mafia and when it came time for him to pay me off that Saturday night they had decided to hold the picture over. I already had other plans and had to leave, so I wanted my money. The man wasn't there to pay me, so I began to put the reels into my car. The manager came over and asked what I was doing and I told him, "You better get your man on the phone and tell him that if he doesn't get his ass over here to pay me tonight, he doesn't have a picture for tomorrow night." I was told that the boss was at the country club and was not to be disturbed. I said fine and continued with what I was doing. The manager reluctantly called him, and was angry when he heard what I planned to do. He drove up in his Cadillac mad as a bull and wrote me a check. I had no idea that I was dealing with the top echelon of the Mafia at the time! They never bothered me though, it was always strictly



business. They were no better or worse than all the rest of them I had to deal with.

MV: Tell me more.

CA: I bought several big pictures in Hollywood. One was *Night Of The Quarter Moon*, the picture had half of Hollywood in it and was made by Albert Zugsmith. Anyway, he was in the middle of a lot of discord with some studio where he was the top stockholder. He couldn't make up his mind, so he sold his stock and got out. Zuggy had all these pictures they were distributing for him. He was a wealthy man and had bought some small radio stations, built them up and sold them for big money and owned several newspapers as well. *Night Of The Quarter Moon* starred Dean Jones, young John Barrymore, Jackie Coogan, Nat King Cole, Julie London, on and on and was about racial conflicts during the sixties.

The picture hadn't done any business. It was a violent picture, Agnes Moorhead played a millionairess who controlled San Francisco society. Her son (Barrymore) comes back from the Korean War and he's kind of flaky and does things to embarrass her. She sends him off to Mexico on vacation where he meets this high yellow (London) and marries her. He brings his bride home and the shit hits the fan because she's black. It was a great story, I paid \$100,000 for the picture and got 70 prints that had never been run through a projector. I re-titled the picture *The Color Of Her Skin* and the tagline copy read, "The most controversial motion picture of our time—When their lips touched, the color line melted." That thing took off like crazy.

I knew that Zugsmith still had his pictures canned up since he left the studio and asked Charlie Krantz, who I bought *Night Of The Quarter Moon* from, to be an agent between Zugsmith and myself since I had never met him before. Well it turned out that Zuggy wanted to meet me as well because he heard that I had taken *Night Of The Quarter Moon* and made it better. I phoned up the campaign a bit and had an artist portray a black man and a white woman in a torrid embrace surrounded by a montage of violence. Charlie and I went to dinner at Zugsmith's home, and while we were there I tried to find out what pictures he had, but he wouldn't talk about it. Charlie calls me the next day and tells me that Zugsmith wanted me to join him. Zugsmith said he had only one partner in his whole life and that was in the newspaper business, the man came in with \$500 and left a millionaire. Well we set up a deal where I just watched two of his pictures a day to decide which ones to give the treatment to. Zugsmith was right in the middle of a picture he was shooting in Mexico starring Troy Donohue. He came back, put the cans in my hands and within a week I realized this wasn't for me.

I bought *18 And Anxious* (which was a flop) from Charlie Krantz and added a medical reel to it and everyone went crazy. Charlie showed the reports to Harry Mandel at United Artists who had made the film, and he wanted to meet me. Well, we became good friends and boxed together. We planned to set up a deal to make some pictures together, but I backed out because of my health and besides, I was happy with my own thing. Those were two opportunities I passed up.

MV: What was the name of your company at the time?

CA: Alexander International Pictures.

MV: How did you hook up with Larry Buchanan?

CA: I was working in Dallas and that's where we met. Larry wanted to make a picture, so we got together and made *The Naked Witch*. I met Larry through Dorothy Sonney, he was just a young and naive guy starting out, and didn't know much about distribution or promotion, but he was good at shooting and lab work. He had made PR films for different companies in 16mm film. Larry told me he wanted to make *The Lochentugh Witch*, who can even say that, so I tell him I'm interested but it will become *The Naked Witch*. We proceeded and I rewrote his damn script to make it more commercial, and he was a hard-head. I rewrote a lot of it, but when they shot the picture he went right back to his original script when I wasn't there. It was a real mess. I financed *The Naked Witch*, and saw how incompetent Larry was. The cast and

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crew wanted me to take over directing it after I told them how I would have done it. But I had to leave. Why fool around with filmmaking when for 50% of what it costs to make a picture, you can take one that already exists and turn it into something great?

Well, I went back to Dallas for the screening of *The Naked Witch* and it turned my stomach. I remember when it was over and the lights were turned on, a number of newspaper people came up to me and asked what I thought of the picture. I said, "Just write, Alexander got up, stopped, vomited and walked out." I told Larry, "You should be put in jail for letting actors in front of your camera." I ended up adding scenes to *The Naked Witch*, the damn picture was only 59 minutes long and I came up with including a history of witchcraft. I put a documentary crawl at the beginning with a narrative about the genius of the old master painters and their depiction of witchcraft through the ages. I went all over the country looking for lithographs of these old paintings, but the libraries wouldn't let me take the books out. I found the images I wanted at Southern Methodist University and offered a student \$500 to take the big art book out of the library. My plan was to bring it over to Jameson Labs and photograph the pictures. The student was scared to do it though, he thought there must be something wrong if I couldn't take the book out myself.

Another time Larry made a picture in Tunisia called *The Rebel Jesus* in 1960. He took his troop to

Tunisia to shoot this religious picture about Jesus' lost years. Well, Larry finds out that this actress he had taken was on dope and Christ they have to hold up shooting while she's sick. This girl died on Larry when he only had a couple of scenes left to shoot, so he just propped her up and shot them—and those are the best damn scenes in the picture because they didn't have the Buchanan influence!

MV: Oh that's good! We transferred a choppy print of *The Naked Witch* that I found in Texas. It had been a lost movie for some time and there's only a handful of horror movies left to find. It doesn't matter how good or bad the film is, half the thrill is just finding the film again. Not to get off Larry Buchanan, but do you know about *Day Of The Strippie*, the film that became *Naughty Dallas*? John Rickert has the executive producer credits for it. The film was shot in 1959 but released in 1964 with new footage.

CA: It was a stripper story. I was in town while they were shooting and Larry wrote this story about a country girl from East Texas who comes to Dallas and becomes a stripper. So much of that picture is about the story. I looked at their screenplay and said "You'll never get this thing off the ground because the stripper clientele wants to see stripping and the regular theater goers want to see a good story. You've got a lousy story and the stripping is terrible, the girl's an amateur. You've got nothing, for Christ's sake, stop

(continued)



where you are and find something else to shoot." Not Larry, though. He and Johnny Rickert were riding high and thought they had a hit. They finished the picture and nobody would touch it. About six months later Johnny calls and asks me to help them get the picture into distribution, but I said I couldn't put what little reputation I had behind it.

Around this time, I had a big date scheduled in Chicago. This guy Sam Levine had a huge drive-in theater that held about 2,000 cars. He was overextended and needed some fast money, so he called me with a deal. He said, "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll have my grand opening with *No Greater Sin* and put you in during the weeks around the Fourth of July and pay you only \$2,000. You'll sell a jillion of your goddamn books, you better line up a freight train to haul them all in!" So I took the deal on one condition, that I come to Chicago to set up the campaign.

The picture opened and the goddamn thing was big. Johnny Rickert shows up at my motel and I end up asking him to help me sell books. By then I had come up with a new gimmick: it was a calculator that

showed a woman's reproductive rhythm system. I came up with a beautiful thing that spins and shows what days a woman's fertile on and when her next menstrual cycle was. I had three items to sell, the birth control calculator and two books at \$3 a throw. I used to have about 100,000 books at a time and had about a nickel into each one that I sold for a dollar. Practically everybody bought all three items and the money was coming in, Johnny had never seen anything like this or so much cash before.

We came back to the motel and I emptied out bags of money onto the bed. Johnny was broke, he had put all his money into *Day Of The Stripper*, borrowed his parent's life savings, saturated his credit cards, and was sleeping in an old station wagon, eating out of tin cans. I gave him money for helping me that night and a week later he wanted to go to work. I took him with me on the next date, he learned fast and had brains enough to follow my formula. He went out on the road with me and then cut him loose on his own. Johnny became very wealthy with these foreign pictures and that damn tax shelter thing.

MV: Did you hire people to help you sell books?

CA: I loved getting out there booking and exploiting dates. I had about five to eight units on the road with *No Greater Sin*. There was this guy Stan Kohlberg who stole books from me and sold them right in the drive-in theater I was showing the picture in. Stan owned a drive-in in Chicago. I was booked in four drive-ins in the area, so he allowed me to store books at his drive-in. That was before I heard he was a thief. I got there to play the picture and noticed that several hundred books were missing. When I asked him about it he claimed they got wet. We opened the first night and I have all these kids selling books for me, and they come up and tell me that there are other people selling books who shouldn't be. I jumped on Kohlberg and he denied it, then continued selling my books. I gave up, by then we weren't speaking. I must have peddled around two million of those books. Wally Nash put my lectures on audiotape, this guy could sell books like crazy.

MV: So you'd do a book pitch over the loud speaker system?

CA: I tried all different ways of selling books, lecture reels, I go all the way back to the wire recorder. Later on I became a lecturer in New England where there were indoor theaters. I could really sell books. I knew exactly where to place the book pitch in the picture. I'd get to the end of the picture, do my pitch then show the medical reel. I'd come on and say "Ladies and gentlemen, the picture you're about to see is of great importance, it's a shocker so if you're squeamish please take a walk or don't look at the screen. If you have children take them to the snack bar. You may not be hungry after seeing this, so we're calling a snack break now," and then I'd ease into the book pitch telling them how sensational the books were and how everybody was buying them so they better act fast. I'd say where I was located or that they could put on their parking lights and someone would come over to their car and sell one to them there. Thirty-five to 40 percent of the house would buy books.

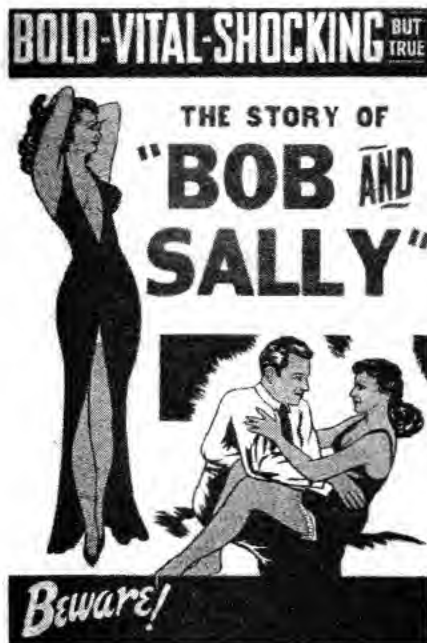
MV: So, it's around 1963 or '64 and you're showing *No Greater Sin* around the country. At that time nudie-cuts and nudist films were becoming popular...

CA: When they started being shown, I was getting tired and disenchanted with traveling. I had a beautiful home in Ohio, had attempted to open a dinner house and bar with a swanky menu, and bought a flying club that had 60 members and seven airplanes. I flew in the war. I got away from the business and hated getting dressed and going into that madhouse Los Angeles. The last thing I did was help L.Q. Jones (*Hell is For Heroes*, *Iron Angel*, *Hang 'Em High*, *The Wild Bunch*), a fine character actor who was my neighbor in Cameron, CA. He wanted to make a movie and got some of the neighbors interested in backing him. I moved in and heard about the picture which was to be about Castro's Cuba. They asked if I would talk to him, but he didn't like what I had to say. We went off by ourselves and I told him that I had an idea for a picture, but I'd never get around to making it. The idea was another witch story and he ended up making it. They couldn't come up with a good title and offered me money to use *The Naked Witch*, but I wouldn't let them. They called it *Witchmaker*. I've had to take action against two or three people who tried to use that title including William Mishkin in New York. He backed off though.

MV: Wasn't that Andy Milligan's *The Naked Witch*? Mishkin represented him and they had to re-title it. There's always been confusion between the two movies with collectors. What other movies did you back?

CA: Basically, I went to independent filmmakers who distributed through the majors and got their films after their contracts were over. I wanted the pictures that were hot and my forte was primarily promotional. I didn't give a damn about making pictures. I didn't really know very many of the men you've worked with, like Dave Friedman and Harry Novak. Over the years I had *Not Wanted*, *Campus Tramp*, *The Legend Of Witch Hollow*, *The Corpse Grinders* and I don't always remember what all the titles were. After I was retired, I wanted to have some fun and make a buck. I no longer had any film, but I still





had my campaign and titles. I went to Detroit and got together a bunch of films, this guy had some prints of *The Naked Witch* that nobody used anymore. I got some other horror pictures as well. There were only four *The Naked Witch* prints and the others I decided to title *The Naked Witch*. I was familiar with all the pictures and knew which ones I could substitute. You'd see a totally different picture at each theater. I coordinated my ad campaign and sold my new show to 16 theaters. One of the exhibitors wanted to see the picture, so I showed him one of *The Naked Witch* prints and everybody else took his word for it.

MV: And according to this newspaper clipping it was 1975? This was when I was going to the drive-in regularly.

CA: Yeah. It was late September in 1975, the weather had been very warm and the advertising agency that did the campaign claimed that the picture would clear \$50,000. The weather was beautiful right up to the opening day and then it turned cold and rained the whole date. I took \$14,000 for my share.

MV: You've created mayhem for film archivists. Let's say someone saw *The Naked Witch* at the drive-in and has been telling people about that movie for years, and then another person saw it and has a completely different story.

CA: I never had any repercussions and nobody complained. Hell, you've got to be creative, innovative and aggressive. You can have all the great ideas

in the world, but if you don't put them to work they won't come to any kind of fruition. Once Larry Buchanan said in a radio interview, "I've met a lot of talkers in my time, but Alexander is a doer."

MV: Did you know Don Davidson?

CA: Hell yeah. Don calls me once a week. He was a protegee of mine.

MV: He took one of Dave Friedman's movies *She Freak*, found 12 prints of it, put a 3-D insert in the film and re-titled it *Asylum Of The Insane*. He roadshowed the movie all over the South in 1972. Dave was furious.

CA: Have you heard of a title *Orgy Of The Living Dead*?

MV: Wasn't that part of a triple-bill package?

CA: I don't really know. As I remember it, I came up with the title and had a picture in mind to stick it on, but it just never materialized. One of the best things I never followed through with was when a friend of mine got cancer and I checked around and found out about cancer films. There are three categories: those for the layman, for paramedics, and really gory films for doctors. I had an idea that I could go to the American Cancer Society in New York and approach them about making a picture about cancer, how to detect the early signs of the disease. I would show the picture in every theater in America and give the American Cancer Society exposure they hadn't thought of before. I talked to exhibitors and told them my idea and said the picture would be free of charge to them to show, and the general consensus was positive. They'd be doing their civic duty. Then I'd write a book that would be so important that it should be next to the family Bible on a stand next to your bed. The book was to be studied periodically and every-



Claude Alexander in his heyday.

one could become educated and understand the symptoms of cancer so that we could beat this thing.

Well, I had the whole thing formulated and planned to sell a jillion books, I even had my book pitch written. I went to the Cancer Society and told them what I had in mind, that they had miles and miles of film that could be edited down to a 40-minute picture for theatrical release. They listened and thought it was a good idea. I mentioned that maybe they could get General Bradley to host the picture because he was their honorary chairman. There were too many channels to go through though, but it would have been big. When I left New York I just forgot about it.

MV: How long was *No Greater Sin* on the road?

CA: After my wife Betsy and I moved to the West Coast I was feeling restless. I still had a couple of prints of *No Greater Sin* and a bunch of books, so I said let's put this picture on the road again. We went up to Oregon and Washington to see if we could get any booking for it. I thought it would make for a fun summer, traveling around and making our expenses with the picture, and hell, the thing took off. That was in 1972. We lived great, during the day we'd pick berries and at night we'd show the picture.

MV: So you were still selling books in 1972?

CA: Hell yeah! Pacific Drive-in Theaters booked

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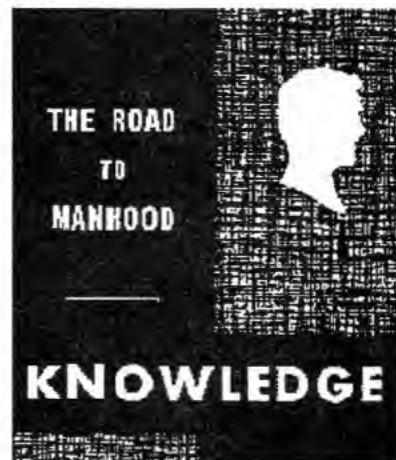
the picture and I put it in theaters in L.A. and even Hawaii. I would make my book pitch and lecture during the intermissions.

MV: In 1972, I'm shocked.

CA: That's not much of a time span. Human nature hasn't changed that much. I could even change the campaign for today and point it at the AIDS crisis, and make this picture sound so revealing that we have to segregate the men and women in the audience. Or maybe just go for the women—men are careless and women are more interested in their welfare and being a responsible sex partner. I could do matinees for women only and have myself sponsored by some fictitious organization.

MV: You always seem to find a good hook or an "educational" point of view.

CA: Well I didn't really sell education. You can't give that away. I sold sexual promiscuity under the guise of education, that's what got them in again and again. ■



Claude's pitchbook.

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## EURO-SLEAZE MASTERPIECES:

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**CALIGULA 2:** Totally uncut Joe D'Amato erotic epic about orgies in Imperial Rome! See a spear shoved up a guy's ass right in front of his frantic family! Plus hardcore sex and fun inhuman torture. (XXX)

**THE DEMONS:** Jesús Franco rips-off THE DEVILS with hilariously sleazy results! Nubile naked nuns are taken & tortured by the evil Inquisition! One of them really is a witch and seduces her tormentors, turning them into skeletons after sex! Lots of possessed masturbating Satanic nuns! (X)

**EMANUELLE IN AMERICA:** Totally uncut version! Joe D'Amato and Laura Gemser bring you the sickest & sexiest Emanuelle film yet! Sex-crazed nympho reporter must stop a sinister cult of misogynist madmen who are brutally torturing and murdering naked women for profit! Gruesome beyond belief, yet crammed full of hardcore sex and bizarre kinks! (XXX)

**HITCH-HIKE: "LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT"** star David Hess returns to rape & terrorize in this tense Italian psycho-thriller. Very rare. (X)

**IMAGES IN A CONVENT:** In Italian only. D'Amato's devil-nuns whip themselves into a nympho-frenzy! See the perverted pawns of Satan! (XXX)

**INQUISITION:** Hooded torturers rip off women's nipples with pliers and Paul Naschy plays Satan, presiding over a demonic witch orgy in the pits of hell! Bug-eyed hunchback rapes & murders suspected witches for the love of Jesus! Wow! (X)

**LILLIAN THE PERVERTED VIRGIN:** In Spanish language only. Jesus Franco's tragic tale of a runaway girl kidnapped by rich sadists & transformed into a dope-addicted sex slave! (XXX)

**LOVE LETTERS OF A PORTUGUESE NUN:** Jesus Franco satanic nun sex-n-torture picture! Masturbating lesbian witches conjure up Satan to have anal sex with a nubile young virgin before your unbelieving eyes! Spectacular sleaze; one of Franco's very best! Uncut. (X)

**NAZI LOVE CAMP 27:** Uncut hardcore version with Nazi rapists on the rampage! Includes original theatrical trailer & 30 min. of disgusting Nazi sex-n-torture movie previews! You'll love it!!!

**PERVERSE COUNTESS:** In Italian language only. Uncut Franco fave stars Alice Arno as a flesh-eating lesbian killer and Lina Romay as her sexy prisoner! Crazy Countess captures girls for sex and food!!! (XXX)

**POOR CECILY:** Poor little rich girl is sold into slavery and must learn how to please her masters the (ahem!) hard way! When she runs away, she is whipped, raped & tortured in a dungeon full of accused witches! One of the best big-budget sex-fests ever made (we mean it!). (X)

**SS EXTERMINATION CAMP:** Evil Nazi sadists torture screaming naked women in the ultimate perverted gross-out freak-fest! Insane uterus transplants, bald pervert tit-maniacs, rape, mass murder, more! (X)

## AMAZING ASIAN SEXY SHOCKERS:

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**BONDAGE FANTASIA:** Spectacular collection of S&M eroticism! Hot! (X)

**BEAUTIFUL DEAD BODY:** Wizard rapist keeps girls in coffins! (XXX)

**ENTRAILS OF A VIRGIN:** Demon-rapist rips out woman's intestines through her vagina! Crazy lady masturbates with severed hand! Yikes! (X)

**GHOUL SEX SQUAD:** Wacky wizard vs. vampire rapists! Subtitled (XXX)

**LUST NEVER DIES:** Undead creeps crave fresh virgin meat! Sexy! (XXX)

**MIND FUCK:** Ninjas, vampires and hardcore sex! Wow! Subtitled. (XXX)

**SUPER NAKED & POWER PUSSY:** Nude lady superheroes fly through the air with magic kung-fu vaginas and kill Japanese Nazis! Unbelievable. (X)

**TALES OF THE WOMEN NINJA 3:** Naked ninjas squirt acid out of their tits & spin webs out of their vaginas! Trashy violence! (X)

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## GROSS-OUT GORY HORROR FLICKS:

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**THE ALIENATORS (1988):** Actually released in foreign markets as both "ALIEN 3" & "TERMINATOR 2" (!) by greedy Italian producers, this terrible rip-off tells the story of scientists turned into "Alien" monsters by the evil "Tubular Corporation". Foul-mouthed Space Marines are sent to exterminate, but are themselves murdered by "Terminator" robots sent in by the evil corporation to cover up their mistake! Mind-bogglingly bad sci-fi/horror will have you gasping in disbelief! Order and see!

**AUTOPSY (1974):** Uncut! Sick chick fantasizes about sex-crazed corpses coming back to life to have sex with her in the morgue! Disgusting; see naked blood-caked zombies lusting after her & each other! Gross! (X)

**THE BEYOND (1981):** Uncut, letterboxed Lucio Fulci zombie splatter classic serves up a tasty spread of face-melting acid baths, eye-gouging & flesh-eating tarantulas!! Easily Fulci's best and most atmospheric film.

**CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST (1979):** Uncut bloodbath of grotesque rape and horror delivers all the splatter that matters: see naked girls impaled vagina-thru-mouth on sharpened sticks, cannibals ripping fetuses out of pregnant women & then stoning them to death, decapitation, disemboweling, animal mutilation, more! A real sickie! (X)

**CAT IN THE BRAIN (1988):** Uncut Lucio Fulci gore spectacle stars Fulci as himself (!) & naked girl chainsawed into luncheon & fed to pigs, Nazi orgies, eye-gouging, gory murders, etc.

**DEMON APOCALYPSE (1992):** Clawed demon hand rips out of the Bible to crush a priest's nuts! Possessed police detectives stab forks in victim's arms! Devil-worshipping freaks massacre people with machetes! Zombies attack when Satan takes over the earth! Bloody chainsaw dismemberment, intestine-ripping, throat-severing horror!!! Who will survive the terror?

**DEMONIA (1986):** Uncut, letterboxed Lucio Fulci. The ghosts of topless nun sluts roast babies alive and murder men with spearguns (!). One poor bastard is ripped in half, then *completely apart* in the goriest splatter EVER!

**GRIM REAPER (1980):** Uncut Joe D'Amato favorite has degenerate cannibal maniac rip open a pregnant woman's belly & eat her flopping fetus in gory detail! A violent trash classic; 10 minutes longer than U.S. release!!!

**GUINEA PIG (1989):** In Japanese language only. Psycho-samurai sadist slowly dismembers helpless woman in excruciating agony! Pus-infected mermaid squeezes worms out of her bloody boils & is chopped to pieces by insane artist painting her portrait in her own pus! First-rate special effects are among the finest seen anywhere; you can't find a more disgusting movie!

**MERCENARY CANNIBALS (1985):** Super-gory, crazy rip-off of "APOCALYPSE NOW" from South East Asia! Bloodthirsty cannibal army called "The Dracula" (!) runs a drug-smuggling operation in Vietnam and it's up to a ruthless band of horny kung-fu mercenaries to stop them! Castration, mutilation, decapitation, brain-eating, knives thru head, eye-gouging, impaling all-out action will astound even the most jaded movie fan. You simply *must* see this film, it's *sooooo* goddamn funny and over-the-top!!!

**TOMBS OF THE BLIND DEAD (1971):** Uncut! Blood-drinking satanic zombie warriors rip open helpless women with swords at their haunted castle! Includes the previously unseen "train massacre" sequence!

**ZOMBIE 3 (1987):** Uncut, letterboxed Lucio Fulci sequel. Zombie virus wipes out the world! Survivors must fight the U.S. army and the zombies!

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# ON THE EDGE OF HOLLYWOOD: AN INTERVIEW WITH TITUS MOODY

by Larry Godsey  
with contributions from  
Gordon Barclay

Walking down Hollywood Boulevard near Vine, toward the building containing Titus Moody's office, you are immersed in the boom-town chaos of old and new. Sidewalk traffic: the old woman who looks like she's been here fifty years and might actually remember seeing a real movie star — once, somewhere; the panhandler who seems to have taken up residence yesterday at a Hollywood Freeway underpass; people of various sexes in heavy leather; disciples of L. Ron Hubbard walking — or is it patrolling — in their neat air force-blue uniforms; the young woman taking a morning stroll in a form-fitting cocktail dress, ripped nylons and glazed eyes. Sunlight and dust lay heavily over it all: sunlight from somewhere above the smog; dust from everywhere, but especially from the subway construction that bullies its way down the Boulevard.

Entering Titus's building, you suddenly find yourself in a protective time capsule. The dark marble and wood, the burnished bronze decorations, the reluctant elevators, put us in a static, fifties mood. Set into this faded glory are a couple of hundred little offices, their door labels implying a couple of hundred different stories. They reveal a life cycle of hope and ambition: Some fresh and new; some dog-eared and stained; some non-existent.

Titus Moody has repeated this cycle several times: Actor in '50s and '60s television and feature films; independent filmmaker; editor and cinematographer. Lately, he has returned to acting. But his earliest ambition, as a teenager in a small town near Chicago in the late '40s, was baseball.

Titus Moody: I was born in Chicago. I moved to a country town when I was about five years old... and that's where I got into motorcycles. In high school I lettered in five sports. I was a wrestler, I played basketball, football, baseball, and also did track. Baseball was my main sport. I had a chance to try out for the pros: The Washington Senators scouted me and I was supposed to go to the tryouts, and I had a motorcycle accident at the time that took me about two years to heal up from. I had no broken bones but my hands were all torn apart.

This injury was not the first one to influence the direction of Titus's life:

TM: I had a head injury and I lose track of time and dates and things so...

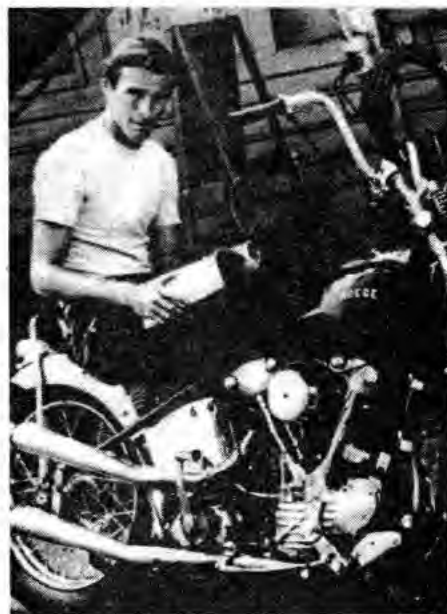
LG: What was that injury from? What happened?

TM: Well, I think when I was about four years old I fell down some stairs and cracked my head on them. I couldn't concentrate. Many years later I found out the inner ear was separated from the brain. A little separation will cause a lot of problems.

LG: Was that something you were able to take care of later in life, have it operated on?

TM: No, not really, it's just something you've got to learn to live with.

LG: Something you have to learn to compensate for.



Titus in his prime in *Outlaw Motorcycles* (1966).

TM: Right.

Fortunately Titus had interests other than sports. He had always been very close to his twin sister, and as teenagers they shared an interest in theater.

TM: When we were in high school we used to do plays together, which was really a lot of fun, you know, because I'd get involved in doing the lighting and building the sets.

LG: Did you also get into acting at that time?

TM: Yeah, I did a lot of parts. I always liked to do the crazy parts. Like I played just parts that were off-the-wall type of things.

After a period of drifting and hitchhiking he ended up in Southern California, working as a machinist until he could find acting gigs. He took acting classes and made a number of friends among fellow students, among them Gordon Barclay,



Titus today with his beloved Chi Chi.

who later starred in several Moody films.

TM: Matter of fact me and Gordon went to Hollywood High, acting. That was always a lot of fun, wasn't it?

Gordon Barclay: That's where I met Titus. That was late '57. I can still see him there. He was in a Western, and he was dressed up like a cowboy. Dorothy Love, the teacher, had this play that she did over and over again. There were a lot of parts for all these young hopefuls.

TM: Actually, they had a bunch of no-good actors in those plays, right?

GB: That's very true — except for Titus and me, that's very true.

TM: Yeah, and you'd have to learn everybody's lines in the play, because people were always forgetting their lines. But when you come right down to it, that was one of the better acting classes in Hollywood at the time, at Hollywood High...

GB: It was free, that was why it was one of the better...

TM: Yeah, but you did a lot there... you checked out other acting classes, and that was the best place to go...

In the late '50s Titus began working as an actor or working in production, mostly on television shows such as *The Walter Winchell File* and the notorious confrontational talk show hosted by Joe Pine. In the early to mid '60s he also acted in several feature films, including *Pork Chop Hill*, *Studs Lonigan*, *Visit To A Small Planet*, and Ray Dennis Steckler's *The Thrill Killers*, *Rat Pink and Boo Boo* and *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed Up Zombies*. In 1966 Titus first produced and directed a film of his own, *Outlaw Motorcycles*.

TM: Gordon, he probably doesn't realize it but he's also a cult classic actor because he's done so many of these movies. He's got movies that are still to be released.

LG: True. He's featured in *Outlaw Motorcycles*. Titus, was that your first film?

TM: I did a lot of acting parts and produced movies for other people, but, yeah, that was a documentary I made, and it was probably one of the first things I did on my own.

LG: I notice in the early minutes of that film there is a lot of very nice black and white footage of a motorcycle gang roaring up to somewhere.

TM: That was the Joe Pine show. We probably didn't get as many shots as we should have, but there must have been a thousand motorcycles there.

GB: I'll interject something here about Joe Pine. He was a one-legged ex-Marine, had been in World War II. He was very antagonistic. He got all sorts of reviews in the papers because he was always pissing his guests off. The only thing I could compare him to today would be Wally George. He (Pine) was very antagonistic: "Get out of here, throw him out" type of attitude. Maybe Wally George copied his style.

TM: But let me say something about Joe Pine. He was an extremely nice person and everything was set-up. He threw people off his show, but the people knew that it was a part of the act. I always used to set people up on the show for Pine. Like one girl stood up in the audience and she started screaming, she had to get an abortion, and this and that, and there was a minister or somebody who was against abortion, and she really did a crazy



scene, but it was all a set-up. She never had a baby, never had an abortion.

Well, I set up the biker thing where all the bikes rode into the studio, and one of the bikers went on the show and did an interview.

LG: Interesting part of the movie.

TM: Yeah, and it looks a lot better now since I added the song, "Harley Between My Legs."

LG: The newly released version has this added dimension of music by the Monks, with Sharon Mitchell singing. In looking at *Outlaw Motorcycles* we're seeing the first completely Titus Moody production. When you made that movie did you feel like, "Hey, this is what I'd rather be doing," rather than acting?

TM: Oh no, it was just a little project between acting jobs. I just had access to some camera equipment and some camera people. I was always interested in motorcycles. I built the very first chrome motorcycle, which is documented in motorcycle magazines. And when we would go on bike runs with the bikers I knew more about the motorcycles than they did.

LG: Were there particular clubs or gangs that you rode with?

TM: I myself never rode with a gang. I just rode with a lot of different actors. I rode with Gordon. We raced all around Hollywood together.

GB: Yeah, I remember, I had a 650 cc Triumph, which was the same kind of bike James Dean had — I had to get the same bike. Anyway, Titus had this hog that belched flames; it was like a rocket taking off. We used to go up and down the Boulevard, we'd spot some girls and maybe harass them and see what they'd do.

TM: The carburetor, when you'd run it rich, too much gas, it'd cause flames to shoot out. A motorcycle was a real good thing to make out with women.

Titus has become friends with many of the stars of the movies in which he also acted. Some of these friendships — with Keenan Wynn, Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper, for instance — were based on a mutual interest in motorcycles. Also, as both actor and production coordinator, he has met a diverse group of actresses.

LG: Are there particular women who stand out for you from our years in Hollywood? Are there actresses you worked with that you're particularly fond of?

TM: Yeah, I worked on *The Doris Day Show*, and she was one my favorites. When she found out I was casting her show she ran from the far end of the stage and hugged and kissed me, and here I didn't have any idea the person knew me.

Then there was Mamie Van Doren. I was cast in one of her movies. It was Mamie, and Jayne Mansfield's in it also. I was playing a biker, the leader of a motorcycle gang.

And one of my best friends was Liz Renay. She went to jail for some kind of money laundering for the gangsters.

GB: Mickey Cohen.

TM: Yeah, she knew all the gangsters. And a lot of people were in on the money laundering, but they sent her and Candy Barr to jail. After she served her time I was working with Ray Steckler, who made a lot of crazy moves, and he cast her in a movie called *The Thrill Killers*. We became very close friends, and we did a scene together. Her young daughter (Brenda Renay) got a part in the movie and all three of us did a scene together.

Liz wanted to go to the Academy Awards, right? So I said, no problem, Liz, we'll go. I had a payola account with Ford. I called up Ford, and they sent me out a Lincoln limousine convertible. So we went to the Academy Awards and we partied; partied with Sammy Davis Jr. and all the big stars, and people from porn, we just had a

good time. But then it ended up in a big scandal.

Liz and I got to a party, and they seated us at the security table, and the person who was sitting there was Police Chief Parker. And District Attorney McKissen was there, and they were both with their wives, right? And all of a sudden Parker went into a rage. He kept hollering, "You're Liz Renay!" And Liz, she kept saying, "No, I'm not Liz, I'm Melissa Morgan." Because she had changed her name to Melissa Morgan, but everybody knew it was Liz Renay.

So she says to me, could you go over and talk to Walter Winchell, he's a very good friend of mine, and have him come over to the table and tell this person here that I'm Melissa Morgan? I said, okay. In the meantime, I tell Parker, leave the girl alone, you know, you're not being cool. Now, you don't tell that to the chief of police, right?

So then I go over and I talk to Winchell. He's a



Gordon Barclay in *Last Of The American Hoboes*.

great publicity hound, he's standing there and all the press are photographing him. "Walter," I said, "Liz Renay..." When I said that he cut me off, he said, "Oh, Liz Renay, is Liz here?" And he starts going to the press, "Big-titted Liz Renay is here." Big titted, he says.

And soon as he said that, the press ran over to the table where Parker and McKissen were sitting, and I'll never forget, Parker, he was just ready to eat his dessert, right? He put his fork into the cake, and then when he saw the press coming he took his fork up and he threw it down on the plate and it bounced way up in the air, and he just split with his wife.

Then Liz and McKissen started talking. He said, Liz, I didn't want to prosecute you, but it was my job and I had pressure to prosecute you. But she only really spent nine months in jail. But me and Liz had so many good times together.

After *Outlaw Motorcycles* Titus worked less in television and studio films, and more on his own productions and those of friends. He began his next major film in 1969. It was a combination documentary and drama called *Last of the American Hoboes*, a sometimes realistic, sometimes nostalgic portrait of vanishing American nomads. It was inspired partly by Titus's own early memo-

ries of hoboes passing through his home town. This utterly independent production called for all the low-budget scavenging skills that Titus and his crew could muster.

TM: One of my favorite movies is called *Last of the American Hoboes*. You talk about low budget, there was no budget. I think I had like soda pop payola, like Coca Cola and Pepsi. I would try to get everybody to come by my apartment and drink up the soda pop — I think you got a nickel a bottle or something like that — and then try to buy some film and go on and shoot stuff.

LG: When you were making that movie you were doing some traveling that was not unlike what hoboes were doing at the time, weren't you? I mean, it wasn't shot in one location.

TM: Oh, it was shot all over the country. Most of it was shot in California here, but, what I would do is, I would have all my film and camera in a big suitcase and I would hitchhike around the country. I hitchhiked to the hobo capital, Britt, Iowa, and got there just when the convention was starting.

In an unpublished interview contributed by Gordon Barclay, Arch Edwards, who was on Titus's crew for a while, recalled their experiences on the road.

Arch Edwards: We were hitchhiking, not only to add a little background, but because we had a ridiculously low sum of money between us... something like \$20. When Titus wasn't hitchhiking I was. Sometimes you'd get so tired, you'd begin to fall over and wake up just before you hit the ground. That's a weird feeling.

As we were ready to head back to L.A., a group of hoboes took up a collection for us — a little bit of money and a breakfast of bacon and eggs. The bacon was sliced off with a World War II Army knife and fried in heavy-gauge black skillets over an open fire. The bacon was a bit rancid, to say the least! Guess it didn't have the same effect on the Pennsylvania Kid, though. He'd been eating on it for about six months.

Besides the footage shot in Britt, Iowa, the production shot in several places in Los Angeles, including Skid Row. Gordon Barclay, who worked on the film as actor, writer and researcher, recalled one instance.

GB: I played the part of a guy who's on the skids. We went into one of the missions downtown, and one of the scenes I do is that I'm in there as a hobo with a gun, and I show it to one of the guys in the mission, and it's sort of like a flashback. So we set it up beforehand. We went up to this one bum in the mission and Titus paid him off with a bottle or something, or a dollar, and says, "This guy's going to show you a gun, and you just react and look at the gun and sort of look away."

So when it came time to do the scene, Titus was shooting with a hidden camera; he had it in a canvas bag or under his jacket. And when I showed this guy the gun he said, "Yeah, you got a gun!" He started acting, right, and he attracted a lot of attention; people lying on the floor and flying out of the room because they thought it was real gun. Titus just kept the camera rolling 'til I got out of there. You see the cameras juggling and the shot isn't in focus or it's going out of focus because we were getting the hell out of there.

TM: The movie was getting publicity, *Cinema-photography Magazine* had it on the front cover, so people kept telling me, you've got to go all the way with it, you know, and I'm sitting with a little Bolex camera which was not a synch sound camera. I worked, I think, four years on the movie, trying to get a little bit of money to shoot another sequence, to do this and do that.

(continued)

And not one person got paid to do the movie. The only cost was film and lab developing, I got kind of a break on that. There was a cameraman living with me at the time. He worked on big projects, and he would store film in my refrigerator. I would get out my rewinds and go in the darkroom and I'd spool it down. From a thousand-foot you can break it down to, like hundred-foot loads, four hundred-foot loads. So when I started I was using his film.

LG: I notice that in a lot of what you do you're very hands-on when it comes to the technical side of it. You know film, you know cameras, you're doing carpentry here in your office. I'm curious, is that something you picked up from your dad when you were a kid, an interest in building things and in knowing how things work?

TM: No, I never knew my father. I'm a dyslexic person. I have a very hard time reading, writing and all that. So I think I have a mechanical aptitude, it just comes natural. I'm very well checked out on editing, I can run any type of camera, and I never took a lesson in my life.

*Last of the American Hoboes* was released to generally favorable reviews in the trades, as the only serious, concentrated film portrait of the hobo. Although well regarded, it never achieved wide release. During the '70s and early '80s, Titus turned to cinematography and acting in several erotic thrillers.

LG: Titus, there's another movie that you and Gordon were involved with, something from 1970 called *The Whip and the Chain*.

GB: Titus called me in and said he had a part for me in sort of an off-beat movie. Titus recommended me as someone who could memorize lines pretty fast. The story line was that my sister is lost, she's sunk into drugs and is being degraded, and I'm trying to find her, and I hire this private detective to find my sister.

LG: And it alternates between your scenes and ones of the sister and the various sexual and sadomasochistic situations she's gotten into because of her troubled past. You're the oh-so-concerned brother who's trying to find her. Then you have a little surprise for the detective at the end. But we won't go into that.

GB: Buy the movie.

LG: Titus, what are your recollections about the movie. After it was made I know it had a troubled career.

TM: I used to do movie posters, and there are two companies downtown, on Skid Row, Los Angeles Street. One showed me their downstairs, and that was ideal for a dungeon scene, and I said okay, we'll do it. And then this other poster person.... The producer wanted to do something in a church, and this person with the poster company says, well, these people are renovating over here, and I have the key to the church. And so they let us go in this church and shoot.

So when we finished and went to make some prints, the lab that did the lab work, they were crooks. Soon as they saw the movie they shipped it out to Memphis, New York and another state, and the movie took the worst busts in the history of porno.

Then the FBI, I believe, put a \$20,000 bounty out on whoever made it. The person that put up the money and was behind it, he split, he sold his house in Hollywood and he got out of town, and nobody's ever seen him since. He left the movie locked in a vault for a least 25 years and would pay rent on the vault with a money order. Then one day I called the vault and they said the guy missed the payment. I bailed the movie out. I can sell it to the European market, but it's still banned in the United States.

In 1975 Titus played the male lead in *The Dirtiest Game In The World*. This is the story of an unscrupulous presidential candidate (Titus) who goes looking for votes among the legalize-drugs crowd. He rejects his promiscuous wife in favor of a drugged-out flower child, and the wife goes on a rampage of sex and violence that ends in a literal blood bath.

LG: Tell me about *The Dirtiest Game In The World*, how it came about.

TM: Well, we used to always go down to Barney's Beanery and party together, and I was just sitting there one night, and this guy came over — his name was Jim Bryan — and said, "Can we come over to your apartment, we want to start doing some line reading and rehearsing," and I said sure. And then before I knew it I was leading actor in *The Dirtiest Game*, which was very popular when it was released. It played the Pussycat chain. Jim Bryan is really an excellent director.

Another "featured player" in *Dirtiest Game* is Chi Chi, Titus's Chihuahua. Chi Chi is now a permanent fixture in Titus's on-screen introductions to his films. Titus modestly describes Chi Chi as "more famous than Lassie, Rin Tin Tin and Old Yeller put together."

LG: When did Chi Chi come on the scene?

TM: This friend of mine owned a theater out in Venice, called the Venice Adult Theater, and I was always in and out of there. I used to help them run the theater, and I would play around with the girls all the time. This one girl I brought back with me had this little Chihuahua dog, and the dog used to always go up on stage with the girls.

So I brought this girl home with me and she lived in my apartment for a while, a couple of months, and then she just left, I don't know where she went.... So I inherited a dog.

LG: You have a big album full of pictures of Chi Chi with various strippers and actresses.

TM: Well, most of them are big-name girls. For instance, Sharon Kane is in it, Taylor Wayne, Dominique Simone. Chi Chi weighs four pounds, and the album weighs 35.

Since *Dirtiest Game In The World*, Titus has rarely acted and has done mostly free-lance editing and cinematography. Most of his own work from the late '70s and '80s covers the Los Angeles strip club scene. Some of this material has been released in a compilation known as *Chi Chi's Night Out*. Very recently, however, Titus has taken on his first major acting role in several years, in an erotic thriller called *Dark Highways*. Director and producer Ted

Dubarry comments on it, and on Titus and Chi Chi:

Ted Dubarry: It's about a psychiatrist who becomes overly attached to her patients and decides to break them out of institutions. They're all very dangerous people, have killed people before, and have very serious problems. What happens is, she loses them, they escape and go in different directions. So the film takes place on three separate highways. Each story is about one of these patients. Titus is in all three parts of the film.

LG: Is he one of the patients?

TD: No, he's actually playing a ghost that is observing all of this.... And Chi Chi is like, not just a dog, Chi Chi is more like another spirit. Chi Chi tells Titus things, and sees the future, and sees things that Titus can't see. It's a horror film, actually. But it has a slant to it that's really dark and strange.

LG: Was this the first time you've worked with Titus as an actor?

TD: In film, yes. We did a small stage adaptation of his movie, *Last Hobo*, when I was in film school. We've known each other for about 10 years, through my dad, who worked on some of his videos.

LG: What was it like working with Titus as an actor, in your movie?

TD: Oh, it was great, because I know him so well. It's not like working cold with someone. He enjoyed it: He said he hadn't been doing film for a long time, as an actor. So it took a little bit of working with him to get him back in the swing of things. But as soon as he became comfortable we were there. We got some really good stuff from him. And Chi Chi was in every part of it. I've known Chi Chi for as long as I've known Titus. That dog's been through a lot.

Titus's career, like that of most independent film makers, has been more the result of inspiration and opportunity of the moment rather than any grand design. Still, several of his films have a common thread. They are rough, honest depictions of people who inhabit the fringe of our society: the hoboes of *Last of the American Hoboes*, the bikers of *Outlaw Motorcycles*, the strippers of *Chi Chi's Night Out*. They capture the look, sound and feel of that world that flows by on the Boulevard, below Titus's window.

(In addition to participating in the interview, Gordon Barclay contributed a transcript of an earlier interview with Arch Edwards on the making of *Last of the American Hoboes*.)

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# GUESS WHO'S COMING TO LUNCH?

## My Interview with William Rotsler and Harry Novak

by Michael Copner



William Rotsler and Harry Novak in a great meeting of the kings of erotic cinema.

It appears that two of the kings of erotic cinema, William Rotsler and Harry Novak, are once again teaming up to create some exciting new products for the cable television market. In years gone by, director Rotsler and producer Novak worked together to bring such classics as *Agony Of Love*, *Mantis In Lace*, and *Girl With The Hungry Eyes* to the silver screen. Now they're together again, by popular demand, to write, produce, and direct a pilot feature that will hopefully lead to a series of films exclusively for cable TV.

I was fortunate to be along for the lunch when Novak and Rotsler discussed their game plan for their upcoming film.

Rotsler: What we're selling on a film of this type is the beauty of the women. That's the major factor.

Novak: And also a story with lots of action.

WR: The story is important, but not the money factor that the woman will be. If we get four beautiful women, they may be more important than good story, bad story, or any kind of story.

HN: Well, you're right. I understand that television is again going to crack down on having so much violence and blood in the pictures. The public is putting pressure on even the cable stations now. So having the beauty, and a logical story—that's our production value. And getting girls who can really act becomes important.

WR: If you're thinking of HBO rather than the Playboy Network, that's a whole different game, and a lot more money. We won't be able to shoot as quickly. I'll look these scripts over that you gave me and see how much money we're talking about.

HN: Of course shooting for just one station is not very profitable. And if it had to be just one, Playboy is not the station.

WR: We'll probably shoot with several cameras, whether you shoot on film or video, so that we're sure to be covered. I still remember the time

that Harry Novak took some film into a new lab that was starting up and instead of putting it through the film developer, they put it through the silver stripper and lost everything; we had to shoot again. Sometimes these processing places will lose your film. They'll swear up and down that you never brought it in, and if they do find it you'll probably never get it back because they've maintained from the start that you never brought it in!

In fact, I'm writing a mystery novel with the Science Fiction writer Larry Niven based on exactly that kind of thing, of having to re-shoot some film; and this is something that actually happened to me. I called up an actress and told her we'd have to re-shoot; she said fine, we set up a day and she never showed up. No one's ever heard of her.

And when that happened, I thought at the time it would make a good murder mystery. A photographer finds out on Thursday that the actress he needs on Monday is missing, and he's got to find her. What does he do? So this is a story I'm working on right now for publication.

Cult Movies: I have some of your early books—the guides to adult films in the 1970s.

WR: I did two. I did the very first book on adult films in 1973; it's called *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*. And then shortly after we came out with a book that was actually just a series of interviews with different actresses. I didn't do it as a book; these interviews had appeared in magazines, and they pulled them together for book publication. They called it, *Girls Who Do Stag Movies*, and it had everybody from Rene Bond to Linda Lovelace in there, with photos and all. That was also in 1973.

CM: Together you and Harry Novak made one of the best exploitation films of all time, *Agony Of Love*. It's got to be Pat Barrington's best film. How was she to work with?

WR: She can't act. Her voice was dubbed by someone else.

CM: It was shot without sound, so everybody's voice is dubbed.

WR: Everybody else dubbed their own voice except for her. For her we got another actress. The story about her is very simple. I saw her in photos for another film called *Orgy Of The Dead* and I decided we should use her.

After we were done shooting, she took the money we'd paid her and went and got a nose job. Then Harry decided we needed to add another scene to the film! So, in the scene where she's talking to the psychiatrist and the whole time she's in the office she's wearing sunglasses—that's for two reasons. First, to disguise the fact that her nose isn't the same. Also, she couldn't remember the long dialogue she had to say, so she's reading the script as it was held right in front of her face. We

didn't want to show her eyes reading. If you look at the dark glasses you can see the reflection of the white paper of the script.

Pat was a stripper, and I think she'd had some ballet experience. She used to do part of her strip act standing on her head, and strangely enough it was very graceful and erotic.

CM: Right in the midst of this fairly gritty film comes the hilarious scene of Pat turning the trick with that gigantic fat man, and all he wants to do is eat. Was that your idea?

WR: Our cameraman, Dwayne Avery came up with that idea. We had trouble keeping the crew from falling down laughing watching us shoot that. We shot it in Hollywood, at a little motel on Yucca Street, just before the freeway entrance. We shot a lot of locations around there, and also down on Sunset Blvd.

CM: Was it a pretty successful film?

HN: Very successful. One of our most popular films.

WR: Of course, in those days it was hard to know how much we could show. Harry had a friend from—was it the vicesquad?—a guy who came around and told us what we could do to stay safe. In the film, the guys keep their pants on, and the girls always keep their panties on. And it was decided that when two people hug each other, it was okay to embrace, but it wasn't okay to squeeze! So that's the way we played the scenes. We didn't know how far we could go, so we played it very safe.

We shot this back to back with *Girl With The Hungry Eyes*. Each one had about a five-day shooting schedule.

CM: So, now you've got a stack of scripts and you're getting ready to shoot at least one of them for cable.

HN: We don't know which one yet. We're having pre-production meetings next week. We need the best story and the biggest stars we can get. When the details and titles are finalized, I'll be on the phone to you. *Cult Movies* will be the first to get the news.

CM: We're looking forward to it! ■





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# GODZILLA VS. SPACE GODZILLA: TOHO PROVIDES A FRESH LOOK AT GODZILLA ON HIS 40TH BIRTHDAY

by David Milner

*Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* (1994), the newest of the twenty-one Godzilla films produced by the Toho Company Ltd., is similar to *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla* (1993), the previous entry in the series, in a number of ways. The opening credits in both movies are superimposed over footage of a giant robot being constructed by the United Nations Godzilla Countermeasures Center (UNGCC), the battles between the monsters in both films are staged similarly and Godzilla is seen heading out to sea at the end of both movies. However, *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* is very different not only from *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla*, but also from all of the other Godzilla films, in two significant regards. The direction is very much like that of a teen idol movie and the camera angles with which much of the footage of Godzilla is photographed are different from those with which virtually all of the footage of Godzilla that is in the previous Godzilla films is photographed.

Hiroshi Kashiwabara's screenplay for *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* allows those who see the movie to get to know Miki Saegusa, the psychic with a telepathic link to Godzilla who appears in the five most recent Godzilla films, better than has ever before been possible. This is because instead of merely warning that Godzilla is about to appear, Miki takes a much more active role in countering him and falls in love. However, Mr. Kashiwabara has Space Godzilla all too conveniently do away with members of a mafia organization who force Miki to use the newly-developed equipment that allows her to control Godzilla for their own purposes only a few minutes after they are introduced. This does not allow those who see *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* to get to know them very well.

In *Ghidrah—The Three-Headed Monster* (1964), Ghidrah is portrayed as an uncontrollable force that not even Godzilla can withstand by himself. However, in most of the other movies in which Ghidrah appears, he is portrayed as being under the control of invading aliens from outer space. This makes the scope of those films much broader than that of *Ghidrah—The Three-Headed Monster*, but it also makes Ghidrah himself seem much less intimidating. In *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*, both G-Force, the military organization run by the UNGCC, and the mafia organization gain control over Godzilla. This makes him seem much less intimidating and it does little to broaden the scope of the movie.

Shortly after G-Force members Koji Shinjo and Kiyoshi Sato arrive on Birth, the island on which Godzilla and Space Godzilla first do battle, a spider lands on Sato's neck. Within seconds, Akira Yuki, another G-Force member, appears from out of nowhere and kills the spider by stabbing it with a knife. This scene at first seems pointless, but after Yuki appears in a few more scenes, it becomes obvious that it is intended to help characterize him.

Director Kenshō Yamashita deserves credit for taking such a different approach toward making a Godzilla movie. Never before has as much of the running time of one been devoted to romance and never before have such atmospheric settings been used to express the feelings of the human characters in one.

Jun Hashizume, who plays Koji Shinjo, and Megumi Odaka, who again plays Miki Saegusa, both give competent but somewhat flat performances. One can see the romantic longing that Shinjo and Miki have for each other on their faces, but it does not appear to be especially intense.

Zenkichi Yoneyama, who portrays Kiyoshi Sato, stands out more than both Mr. Hashizume and Ms. Odaka, even though he does not have as many lines as either one. This not only is because Sato dresses much less conservatively than Shinjo and Miki, but also because he is much more expressive.

In *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* (1989), Col. Goro Gondo, who is killed when Godzilla destroys one of the Twin 21

buildings in Osaka, is played by Toru Minegishi. In *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*, Col. Gondo's sister Chinatsu Gondo is played by Towako Yoshikawa. Her performance is comparable to Ms. Odaka's, but it is a little more animated.

Akira Emoto very affectingly portrays Akira Yuki as being obsessed with killing Godzilla. Yuki at first seems deranged, but once it is revealed that he is motivated by a desire to avenge the death of his good friend Goro Gondo, his actions become much more understandable.

Yosuke Saito does an excellent job of making Dr. Susumu Okubo, the mafia agent who infiltrates the UNGCC, seem loathsome without resorting to maniacal laughter or exaggerated sneers.

Kenji Sahara, who plays UNGCC director Takayuki Segawa, Akira Nakao, who plays G-Force commanding officer Takaaki Aso, and Koichi Ueda, who plays G-Force second-in-command Iwao Hyodo, reprise their roles from *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla*. They all give good performances, but Mr. Nakao stands out most because he completely dominates every scene in which he appears.

Keiko Imamura and Sayaka Osawa reprise their roles as the cosmos, the two six-inch tall women from outer space whom Mothra rescues from an unscrupulous entrepreneur in *Godzilla Vs. Mothra* (1992). They do a more than adequate job of showing the appropriate concern when the cosmos inform Miki Saegusa that Space Godzilla is about to appear.

The special effects footage in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* generally is excellent. The pyrotechnics display seen when Space Godzilla attacks Godzilla with a number of large crystals that explode upon impact is very impressive and the scene in which Space Godzilla levitates Godzilla is surprisingly convincing. However, some of the footage of the battle in outer space between Space Godzilla and MOGERA (Mobile Operation Godzilla Expert Robot Aero-Type) leaves something to be desired because the model of MOGERA that is seen in it looks too much like a model.

The matte work is flawless. All of the composite shots of people running away from monsters are very convincing.

All of special effects director Koichi Kawakita's trademark optical effects also are superb. Godzilla's radioactive breath and the rays emitted by Space Godzilla and MOGERA are very well animated. This is especially true of Space Godzilla's rays not only because they seem so powerful, but also because they are so different from the rays emitted by all of the other monsters Godzilla has faced.

The new Godzilla costume is a good one. It is a little bulkier than the one constructed for *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla*, but it lacks the exaggerated musculature of the one constructed for *Godzilla Vs. Ghidrah* (1991).

Space Godzilla is similar in appearance to Godzilla, but like Biollante, he has four very short tusks and a large number of very long and sharp teeth. Space Godzilla also is different from Godzilla in that he has a very large crystal jutting up from each of his shoulders and several rows of crystals running down his back. These all make Space Godzilla look very powerful, but they also make him seem like the kind of monster one would expect to see in an episode of one of the Ultraman television series instead of a Godzilla film.

The design of MOGERA is similar to the design of the two identical robots called Mogera that are used by invading aliens from outer space in their attempt to take over Earth in *The Mysterians* (1957). However, it is much more contemporary than that of the two Mogeras.

In *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*, the baby Godzilla introduced in *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla* grows into Little Godzilla. Although the baby Godzilla looks very much like a dinosaur, Little Godzilla looks more like a stuffed doll. This provides young children a character with

which they can identify, but it also alienates adults.

Fairy Mothra, the image of Mothra that Miki Saegusa sees whenever the cosmos communicate with her through telepathy, is similar to Little Godzilla in that it is very cute. Its eyes are very large, its antennae are very long and its abdomen is short and round. Despite this, Fairy Mothra does not alienate adults all that much because it is not seen all that much.

Portions of Takayuki Hattori's score for *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* are very good. "G-Force Theme," "Birth Island," "Mogera Ready To Go," and "Love Theme" are all very affecting. However, "Godzilla's Theme 1994" does not characterize Godzilla very well, "Little Godzilla" does not fit in with the rest of the score because it is the only children's piece in it and "Space Godzilla's Theme," "ESP Melody" and "Mischief of Little Godzilla" just are not enjoyable.

Akira Ifukube's "Legend of the Cosmos," which is taken from *Godzilla Vs. Mothra*, fits in well with the rest of the music in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*, but his "Godzilla's Theme" from *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla* does not. This is because it is written in a style that is not as contemporary as the styles in which all of the other pieces of music in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* are written.

Japanese rock group Date of Birth's contribution to the score, a ballad called "Echoes of Love," is heard as the ending credits roll. It is good, but not outstanding.

"Groove It—Yourself," the rap to which Kiyoshi Sato dances while he and Koji Shinjo are sailing to Birth Island, is Katsu's contribution to the score. "C'mon" and "get up" are the only lyrics in the rap, but it serves its purpose.

Space Godzilla's roar is similar to Biollante's in that it is high-pitched, but it is not quite as intimidating.

Many of Little Godzilla's utterances are identical to those of Daigoro, the monster that is orphaned while he is still an infant in the children's movie *Monster Desperate Fight—Daigoro Vs. Goliath* (1972). This and the cute appearance of Little Godzilla make it undeniable that he is intended to appeal to children.

Masahiro Kishimoto's photography is very good. Especially well lensed are the shots of Koji Shinjo and Miki Saegusa talking to each other while the sun sets in the background and those of Akira Yuki hanging upside down from a defective escape hatch on MOCERA.

Kenichi Eguchi's special effects photography is a little inconsistent. The distant shots of Godzilla approaching Birth Island are magnificent and those of only the lower portion of his body make him seem immense, but the off-center close-ups of Godzilla's head are a little peculiar.

The editing generally is competent, but some of the transitions from one scene to another are abrupt. In addition, the footage of Godzilla trying to free Little Godzilla from Space Godzilla's crystal trap on Birth Island that was supposed to follow the footage of the battle between Godzilla and Space Godzilla on the island should have been used. This is because its omission leaves those who see *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* wondering why Godzilla would defend Little Godzilla from Space Godzilla and then just leave him trapped.

The stock footage of Mothra from *Godzilla Vs. Mothra* and that of Biollante from *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* is appropriate. This is because it shows events that lead up to those in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*. However, there is no reason for the shots of Godzilla underwater from *Godzilla Vs. Mothra*, those of naval vessels attacking Godzilla from *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* and those of naval vessels attacking Godzilla from *Godzilla Vs. Mothra* to be in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*.

In *Godzilla Vs. Destroyer*, which Toho is planning to release in Japan in December, Godzilla will be killed. This has not happened since the original Godzilla was done in by the oxygen destroyer in *Godzilla—King Of The Monsters* (1954). Since the device plays a role in *Godzilla Vs. Destroyer*, it would have been much more fitting for Toho to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the release of *Godzilla—King Of The Monsters* with *Godzilla Vs. Destroyer* instead of *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* or *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla*, which the studio actually used to commemorate the anniversary because TriStar Pictures' *Godzilla* originally was scheduled to be released in 1994 instead of 1996. However, at least for those fans of Godzilla who have been waiting for Toho to produce a Godzilla movie with the same sort of tragic atmosphere as *Godzilla—King Of The Monsters*, bringing back the oxygen destroyer and the sentiments that are represented by it a little late is better than not bringing them back at all. ■



# KENSHOU YAMASHITA INTERVIEW

by David Milner

Translation by Yoshihiko Shibata

Kenshou Yamashita directed *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* (1994). He also directed *Troubleman Laughs And Kills* (1979) and *Nineteen* (1987).

**CM:** Cult Movies: Did Shogo Tomiyama ask you to direct *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*? [Mr. Tomiyama produced *Yamato Takeru* (1994). He and executive producer Tomoyuki Tanaka produced *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* (1989), *Godzilla Vs. Ghidrah* (1991), *Godzilla Vs. Mothra* (1992), *Godzilla Vs. MechaGodzilla* (1993) and *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*.]

Kenshou Yamashita: I was commissioned by Yoshinobu Hayashi, the president of Toho. (The Toho Company Ltd. produced all twenty-one of the *Godzilla* movies. It also produced *Rodan* (1956), *Mothra* (1961) and a large number of other science fiction films.)

**CM:** Did you take part in writing the screenplay for *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*?

KY: Hiroshi Kashiwabara, Mr. Tomiyama and I prepared a story outline and then Mr. Kashiwabara wrote the script.

**CM:** How long did it take Mr. Kashiwabara to complete the first draft of the screenplay?

KY: The story outline was completed in December, 1993 and Mr. Kashiwabara submitted the first draft of the script at the end of March, 1994.

**CM:** When did Mr. Kashiwabara submit the final draft of the screenplay?

KY: He submitted it on May 30, 1994.

**CM:** How was the first draft different from the final one?

KY: There was a scene featuring two young men admiring a young woman at the beginning of the first draft, but it was not included in the final one. In addition, the battle in outer space between *Space Godzilla* and *MOGERA* was much longer in the first draft. (Invading aliens from outer space use two identical robots, both of which are called *MOGERA*, in their attempt to take over Earth in *The Mysterians* (1957). In *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*, the United Nations *Godzilla Countermeasures Center* (UNGCC) uses *MOGERA* (Mobile Operation *Godzilla* Expert Robot Aero-Type) against *Space Godzilla*.)

**CM:** Why were those changes made?

KY: The script for a movie with a running time of one hour and forty-five minutes should be about one hundred and 10 pages long. The first draft was 140 pages long.

**CM:** Did you select the members of the cast of *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*?

KY: Yes.

**CM:** Had you previously worked with any of them?

KY: Akira Nakao, Koichi Ueda and Jun Hashizume. Mr. Hashizume and I worked together on director Kon Ichikawa's *Makioka Sisters* (1983) while I was still an assistant director. (G-Force is the military organization run by the UNGCC. Mr. Hashizume plays Koji Shinjo, a member of G-Force. Mr. Ueda, who has bit parts in the five most recent *Godzilla* films and *Yamato Takeru*, plays G-Force second in command Iwao Hyodo in *Godzilla Vs. MechaGodzilla* and *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*. Mr. Nakao plays G-Force commanding officer Takaaki Aso in both movies.)

**CM:** Did you have to get approval from Mr. Tomiyama to use the actors you chose?

KY: Mr. Tomiyama said that I had to use Mr. Hashizume and Megumi Odaka, but he allowed me to choose the other actors. (Ms. Odaka plays Miki Saegusa, a psychic with a telepathic link to *Godzilla*, in the five most recent *Godzilla* films.)

**CM:** Did you make the decision to ask Takayuki Hattori to score *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*? ("Echoes Of Love," the song heard while the ending credits are shown, was written and performed by the Japanese rock group Date of Birth.)

KY: Yes.

**CM:** Why did you choose Mr. Hattori?

KY: Mr. Hattori is very young. In addition, I admire his abilities. He is very versatile. He can compose both classical and contemporary music.

**CM:** Had you previously worked with Mr. Hattori?

KY: No. A friend of mine who is a musician told me

about him. So, I decided to listen to his demonstration tape. It is what convinced me that I should ask Mr. Hattori to score *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*.

**CM:** Did you first ask Akira Ifukube to score the movie? (Mr. Ifukube, one of Japan's most respected classical composers, scored *Godzilla — King Of The Monsters* (1954), *Terror Of MechaGodzilla* (1975), *Godzilla Vs. MechaGodzilla* and many of the other science fiction films produced by Toho.)

KY: There was a scheduling conflict.

**CM:** Did Mr. Tomiyama ask you to include Mr. Ifukube's music in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*? (Stock tracks were used.)

KY: No. It was my decision. The members of the audience expect to hear Mr. Ifukube's music whenever they see a *Godzilla* movie.

**CM:** How much time did you spend shooting *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*?

KY: Fifty days.



Kenshou Yamashita

**CM:** Did you direct any of the special effects footage that is in the film? (Koichi Kawakita directed the special effects for *Godzilla Vs. Biollante*, *Godzilla Vs. Ghidrah* and all of the *Godzilla* movies which since have been produced. He also directed the special effects for *Nineteen*, *Yamato Takeru* and a number of Toho's other science fiction films.)

KY: I directed the footage of the NASA spaceship being destroyed by *Space Godzilla*'s crystals. (*Space Godzilla* uses large crystals as weapons.) I also directed the footage of *Fairy Mothra* (*Mothra* flies into outer space to deflect an asteroid that is on a collision course with Earth at the end of *Godzilla Vs. Mothra*: At the beginning of *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*, Miki Saegusa has a vision in which *Fairy Mothra* warns her that *Space Godzilla* is on his way to attack Earth.)

**CM:** How much time did you spend in post-production?

KY: About 40 days. The schedule was very tight.

**CM:** Did you or Mr. Kawakita choose which special effects footage would be used?

KY: I had the right to edit both the standard and the special effects footage, but I did not do so. Mr. Kawakita edited the footage that he'd directed and I edited the footage that I'd directed. We then discussed each other's work and did the final editing together.

**CM:** Did Mr. Tomiyama take part in the editing?

KY: I had to obtain his approval during the final stage of editing.

**CM:** *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* has some of the characteristics of a teen idol movie. Why is this?

KY: Mr. Tomiyama and I felt that Miki Saegusa was at a good age to begin thinking about something other than *Godzilla*. (Ms. Odaka recently turned twenty-three.)

**CM:** Are there any improvised lines in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*?

KY: Many.

**CM:** Can you remember which lines were impro-

vised?

KY: As Akira Yuki watches *Godzilla* leave Fukuoka at the end of the movie, he says that he is going to retire from G-Force and leave battling *Godzilla* to the younger members of the organization. He also says that since Fukuoka is where his good friend Goro Gondo was born, he will stay in the city for a few days. Those lines were improvised. (Akira Yuki is played by Akira Emoto. Col. Gondo, who is killed by *Godzilla* in *Godzilla Vs. Biollante*, is played by Toru Minegishi. The battle between *Godzilla*, *Space Godzilla* and *MOGERA* at the end of *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* takes place in Fukuoka.)

**CM:** Little *Godzilla* is much cuter than *Baby Godzilla*. Why is this? (*Baby Godzilla* is introduced in *Godzilla Vs. MechaGodzilla*. In *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*, he grows into Little *Godzilla*.)

KY: The monsters are designed by the special effects staff, so I don't know why Little *Godzilla* was designed the way he was. However, I suspect that Mr. Kawakita did not like the design of *Baby Godzilla* so he made Little *Godzilla* much cuter.

**CM:** *Godzilla Vs. MechaGodzilla* was recorded in digital sound, but *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* was recorded in analog sound. Why is this?

KY: The sound system that is now being used is soon going to be replaced by a more sophisticated one. Toho is waiting for this to happen. In addition, all post-production work on *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* had to have been completed at least one month before the film opened so that theaters could be re-equipped for digital sound.

**CM:** Were there any scenes shot for *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* that weren't included in the movie?

KY: Yes. We shot a scene in which a young man teases a waitress in a restaurant. It was going to be inserted at the beginning of the film. We also shot a scene in which the head of the mafia orders Dr. Okubo to send *Godzilla* to attack Tokyo. (Susumu Okubo, a member of the mafia organization which kidnaps Miki Saegusa and steals the equipment she uses to control *Godzilla*, is played by Yosuke Saito.)

**CM:** I've heard that there was footage shot of *Godzilla* trying to free Little *Godzilla* from *Space Godzilla*'s crystal trap on Birth Island and *Godzilla* showing a great deal of frustration as he leaves the island. Is this true? (*Godzilla* does not succeed in freeing Little *Godzilla*.)

KY: Mr. Kawakita told me about that footage. He said that he didn't use it because it was too serious.

**CM:** Was there any consideration given to including any monsters in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* that do not appear in the movie?

KY: Mr. Tomiyama suggested that we have three giant dragonflies attack Little *Godzilla* on Birth Island, but I decided not to use the idea.

**CM:** Was there any consideration given to including a new *MechaGodzilla* in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* instead of *MOGERA*? (*MechaGodzilla* is destroyed at the end of *Godzilla Vs. MechaGodzilla*.)

KY: Mr. Kawakita made the decision to use *MOGERA* instead of a new *MechaGodzilla*. It allowed the battles in the film to take place in a wider variety of settings. (*MOGERA* is formed when two different vehicles, the *Star Falcon*, which can fly in outer space, and the *Land Mogera*, which can tunnel underground, are combined.)

**CM:** You began working for Toho in 1969. Were you hired as an assistant director?

KY: That's right.

**CM:** On which movies did you first work as an assistant director?

KY: *Who Am I* (1969) is the first one on which I worked. It is a situation comedy about a frustrated businessman who wants to escape from reality. He turns into a bull, but soon afterward his girlfriend begins trying to turn him back into a human being. (The businessman is played by Tani Kei, the member of the Crazy Cats comedy team who takes his name from Danny Kaye.)

**CM:** Which other films did you work on as an assistant director?

KY: *Battle Of Okinawa* (1971), which was directed by Kihachi Okamoto. It is the first major movie on which I worked. (Mr. Okamoto also directed *All About Marriage* (1958), *The Last Game* (1979), *Rainbow Kids* (1991) and a large number of other films.)

**CM:** You served as the chief assistant director on *Terror Of MechaGodzilla*. Did you direct any of the scenes in the movie?

KY: I can hardly remember, but probably not.

**CM:** What was working with Shiro Honda like? (Mr. Honda directed *Terror Of MechaGodzilla*. He also di-

(continued)

rected *Godzilla — King Of The Monsters*, *Ghidrah — The Three Headed Monster* (1964), *Destroy All Monsters* (1968) and many of the other science fiction films produced by Toho.)

KY: Since *Terror Of MechaGodzilla* was the first movie on which I worked after I was promoted to chief assistant director, I was very nervous. So, I didn't give Mr. Honda any advice. I just studied him and tried to learn as much as I could. I knew that Mr. Honda was a craftsman, so I just tried to learn his craft.

I had the impression that Mr. Honda was a very serious person before I began working with him, but once I got to know him, I discovered that this was not what he was like. He was very warmhearted and open minded.

CM: You must have enjoyed working with Mr. Honda very much.

KY: Yes. It was very enjoyable. Mr. Honda made a very good impression on me.

CM: What was working with Akihiko Hirata like? (Mr. Hirata plays Dr. Shinji Mafune, the inventor of the device which invading aliens from outer space use to control *Titanosaurus*, in *Terror Of MechaGodzilla*. Among the other characters he has played are Dr. Daisuke Serizawa, the inventor of the oxygen destroyer, in *Godzilla — King Of The Monsters* and astronomer Ryoichi Shiraishi in *The Mysterians*.)

KY: Mr. Hirata had quick responses. He would make quick decisions.

CM: What was working with Mr. Ichikawa like? (He directed not only *Makioka Sisters*, but also *The Burmese Harp* 1956, *Fires On The Plain* 1959) and a large number of other films.)

KY: Mr. Ichikawa is a very different kind of director. He distorts reality to fit his own image.

CM: Assistant directors had to direct three movies before Toho would officially promote them to director back in the 1950s and 1960s. (Assistant directors would be fired when they were promoted. They then would have to contract with Toho on an independent basis.) When were you promoted to director?

KY: It was possible for a director to direct three films within a few years or even one year back in the 1950s and 1960s, but these days it is not because Toho produces a much smaller number of movies. Toho promoted me before I directed *Troubleman Laughs And Kills* and proposed that I quit and begin contracting independently after the film was completed. However, I insisted that I remain a Toho employee because directors still had a

right to direct three movies before being fired. I finally began contracting independently with Toho just before I started working on *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*.

CM: How was working on *Nineteen* different from working on *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*? (*Nineteen* is a teen idol film.)

KY: The production budget was very low. In addition, very few of the scenes in the movie were shot by the special effects staff.

CM: Was the production budget for *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* much larger than the one for *Nineteen*?

KY: The production budget for *Nineteen* was twice that of *Troubleman Laughs And Kills*. The one for *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* was eight times larger.

CM: Was the production budget for *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* about the same as the one for *Godzilla Vs. MechaGodzilla*?

KY: Yes.

CM: How did you react when you were asked to direct *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*?

KY: I had been having a very hard time before I was asked to direct the film because several of the movies I previously had worked on were cancelled just before production was scheduled to begin. So, I was surprised and very happy. I also was a little intimidated. I remember that I felt I had to do the best work I could.

CM: Would you say that your work on *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* was influenced by that of any of the other directors who worked on the *Godzilla* series?

KY: I watched all of the *Godzilla* films and got a very strong impression of what one should be like, but I wouldn't say that my work was influenced by theirs. I tried to create my own *Godzilla* movie.

CM: What was working with Ms. Odaka like?

KY: She always thinks while she is acting.

CM: What was working with Kenji Sahara like? (Mr. Sahara plays Takayuki Segawa, the director of the UNGCC, in both *Godzilla Vs. MechaGodzilla* and *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*. Among the other characters he has played are miner Shigeru Kawamura in *Rodan* and inventor Kazuo Fujita in *King Kong Vs. Godzilla* 1962.)

KY: We worked on many films together while I was an assistant director. Mr. Sahara is a very experienced actor. He knows how to create his own role and how to perform in any given situation. He would have been a very big star if the Japanese movie industry had been more successful. (Films produced in Hollywood are very popular in Japan.)

CM: Are you pleased with the way *Godzilla Vs. Space*

*Godzilla* turned out?

KY: I generally am satisfied with it, but there are some aspects with which I am not completely satisfied. I probably will find more faults in the movie and become less satisfied with it as time goes on.

CM: With which aspects are you most pleased?

KY: I think it is important for special effects footage to blend well with standard footage. So, I tried to make the transitions from the standard footage to the special effects footage as smooth as possible. I think that turned out well.

Birth Island is barren. There are no buildings on it which can be used to judge the size of *Godzilla*. So, I used the expressions of the members of G-Force to depict it. I think that also turned out well.

CM: With which aspects are you unsatisfied?

KY: All of the events in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* lead up to the battle between *Godzilla*, *Space Godzilla* and *MOGERA* in *Fukuoka*. I don't think there is any reason for the battle between *Godzilla* and *Space Godzilla* on Birth Island to be in the film.

CM: Which of the movies you directed is your favorite?

KY: I think it would be best for me to say that *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* is my favorite.

CM: Which of Toho's older science fiction films are your favorites?

KY: *Godzilla — King Of The Monsters*. It is not a monster movie. It is very difficult to classify. I also was very impressed by *Rodan* and *Mothra* when I was young.

CM: How did you like *Jurassic Park* (1993)?

KY: I enjoyed it. It's a wonderful film.

CM: Some people have criticized the movie because its plot is so limited. Do you feel this criticism is valid?

KY: I read the original novel, so I do feel that it is valid.

CM: Are you going to direct any other films in the near future?

KY: I don't have any projects lined up at the moment.

CM: Would you like to direct another *Godzilla* movie?

KY: Yes.

CM: What do you think the next few *Godzilla* films produced by Toho should be like?

KY: I think *Godzilla* must remain an antagonist. I see Little *Godzilla* as a very bad omen because he is so cute.

CM: How do you feel about TriStar Pictures producing a *Godzilla* movie in the United States?

KY: *Godzilla* was created by radiation from a hydrogen bomb. He no longer would be *Godzilla* if TriStar were to change this. ■

## KOICHI KAWAKITA INTERVIEW

by David Milner

Translation by Yoshihiko Shibata

Koichi Kawakita directed the special effects for *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* (1989), *Godzilla Vs. Ghidrah* (1991), *Godzilla Vs. Mothra* (1992), *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla* (1993), *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* (1994) and a number of other science fiction films. He also directed the special effects for *Samurai Of The Big Sky* (1976) and *Zero* (1984), both of which are war movies.

Cult Movies: Why wasn't *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* produced sooner than it was?

Koichi Kawakita: Shortly after *Terror Of MechaGodzilla* (1975) was released, a large number of *Godzilla* fans began urging Toho to produce another *Godzilla* film. (The Toho Company Ltd. produced all 21 of the *Godzilla* films. It also produced *Rodan* (1956), *Mothra* (1961) and many other science fiction movies.) This is what eventually prompted the release of *Godzilla 1985* (1984). It was not as successful as Toho had anticipated it would be, so the studio decided to pit *Godzilla* against another monster in the next *Godzilla* movie. (*Godzilla* is the only monster in *Godzilla 1985*.)

A story contest was held to obtain ideas for what was being called *Godzilla II*. About 3,000 entries were received. The members of the selec-

tion committee read over all of the entries and after a year chose 20 for further consideration.

After a second year had passed, two stories were chosen from among the 20 for final consideration. One pitted *Godzilla* against *Biollante*, a monster that had been created by bio-technology, and the other pitted him against a massive computer. Finally, after a third year had gone by, Toho decided to produce the story featuring *Biollante*.

CM: Why wasn't *Deuterios* included in *Godzilla Vs. Biollante*? (*Deuterios*, a monster created by the combination of rat and fish cells, is in the original story contest entry.)

KK: I don't remember.

CM: Footage showing *Biollante*'s tendrils attacking *Godzilla* was created with claymation techniques, but it wasn't used. Why is this? (*Biollante* is created when cells from *Godzilla*, a woman and a rose are combined.)

KK: No water could be seen in the footage. It didn't match the other footage of *Godzilla* and *Biollante* doing battle in Lake Ashino that we'd shot.

CM: The rays emitted from *Ghidrah*'s three mouths in *Godzilla Vs. Ghidrah* originally were all going to be different colors. Why did you decide to instead make them all yellow?

KK: I considered many different colors for the rays, but I ultimately decided that the original

color was the most suitable one. (*Ghidrah — The Three-Headed Monster* (1964) is the first movie in which *Ghidrah* appears.)

CM: The unfolding of *Mothra*'s wings that takes place immediately after *Mothra* emerges from his cocoon in *Godzilla Vs. Mothra* originally was going to be depicted with computer graphics. Why was it instead depicted with models of the wings?

KK: The look of analog film is very different from that of digital video. Matching the two is very difficult. I didn't think the computer graphics fit into the footage that we'd shot on the set very well.

CM: Why did you change the color of *Godzilla*'s breath from blue to red at the end of *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla*? (The change occurs after *Godzilla* absorbs energy from *Fire Rodan*.)

KK: The idea was not in the script or the storyboards. As James Cameron told me, films are living things. They change as they go through the various stages of production.

I decided to change the color of *Godzilla*'s breath for two different reasons. One was the fact that *Rodan* changes color after *Godzilla* attacks him with his radioactive breath and the other was my desire to show the power of nature. (*Rodan* transforms into *Fire Rodan* after doing battle with *Godzilla*. *Rodan* is brown in color, but *Fire Rodan* is red. The main theme of *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla* is "real life against artificial life.")

CM: The design of *Space Godzilla* is very different from that of the other monsters Toho has created. On what was it based?



KK: It was based on the design of Super Godzilla in the "Super Godzilla" game for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System. Space Godzilla from the chest up is very similar in appearance to Super Godzilla.

I thought Space Godzilla should have crystals on his shoulders. I also thought that he should have some special power, so I put an antenna-like object on his head. (The "space horn" provides Space Godzilla with a radar capability.) I first designed Space Godzilla and then came up with the explanation of his creation. (A Godzilla cell is sucked into a black hole in outer space.)

CM: Little Godzilla is very different in appearance from Baby Godzilla. Why is this? (Baby Godzilla is introduced in *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla*. In *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*, he grows into Little Godzilla. Little Godzilla is not only much larger, but also much cuter, than Baby Godzilla.)

KK: *Godzilla Vs. Mothra* was very successful because an unusually large number of women went to see it. So, we wanted to include something in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* that would appeal to them. In addition, I wanted to show Little Godzilla growing from a dinosaur into a monster. (*Godzilla Vs. Mothra* was more successful in Japan than any other Godzilla movie produced since *Godzilla Vs. The Sea Monster* (1966).)

CM: Why was MOGERA included in *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*? (Aliens from outer space use two identical robots, both of which are called Mogera, in their attempt to take over Earth in *The Mysterians* (1957). In *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla*, the UNGCC (United Nations Godzilla Countermeasures Center) uses MOGERA (Mobile Operation Godzilla Expert Robot Aero-Type) against Space Godzilla.)

KK: When Space Godzilla arrives in Fukuoka, large crystals instantly appear in the city. They are the source of his power. Since the crystals have underground roots, a machine that can tunnel underground is needed to destroy them. (Mogera tunnels underground in *The Mysterians*.)

CM: Was there much special effects footage shot for *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* that was not included in the film?

KK: Yes. The majority of it is from the battle between Godzilla, Space Godzilla and MOGERA in Fukuoka.

CM: Some people prefer the version of *Sayonara Jupiter* (1984) that was broadcast on Japanese television to the one that was released in Japanese theaters. Which version do you prefer? (The movie was edited before it was broadcast.)

KK: I prefer the edited version. I share Sakyo Komatsu's concerns about the environment, but I feel that the scenes which take place at the Jupiter Foundation are not necessary. (Mr. Komatsu wrote the original novel on which *Sayonara Jupiter* was based. He also wrote the screenplay for the film. The Jupiter Foundation is an organization of people who reject technology and prefer to live in harmony with nature.)

CM: Was *Gunhed* (1989) based on the *Godzilla II* story contest entry in which Godzilla does battle with a massive computer?

KK: It was based on that story.

CM: Was the full-scale model of *Gunhed* very difficult with which to work?

KK: The full-scale model was constructed not only for filming, but also for use in promotion. It was much more difficult to work with than the smaller models. *Gunhed* was designed by an artist who primarily works on animated movies and it was very difficult to make a three-dimensional object from his original design drawings.

CM: The hands of the Kumaso god transform into a bow and arrows in *Yamato Takeru* (1994). How was that footage created?

KK: The original footage was input into a com-

puter and processed. The processed footage then was inserted into the film. This is my image of the future of movies.

CM: The monsters that you create all transform. Why is this? (The *Godzillasaurus* seen in *Godzilla Vs. Ghidrah* becomes *Godzilla*, *Rodan* turns into *Fire Rodan* in *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla* and soon.)

KK: I prefer to have them transform. It provides more entertainment for the members of the audience and it serves as an identifying characteristic of the current *Godzilla* films.

CM: The monsters you create do not wrestle with each other very much. They instead just use their rays. Why is this?

KK: There are two reasons. One is the fact that it would almost be impossible for the monsters to wrestle with each other because of their tremendous size and weight. The other is my feeling that the monsters seem too human when they wrestle with each other.

CM: Why wasn't *Mothra Vs. Bagan* (1990) produced? (It was proposed by Kazuki Omori, who



Koichi Kawakita

wrote and directed *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* and *Godzilla Vs. Ghidrah* and wrote but did not direct *Godzilla Vs. Mothra*.)

KK: It wasn't produced because *Godzilla* wasn't in it. Toho didn't think that *Mothra* was popular enough to attract a large audience.

CM: Why wasn't *Counterattack of Ghidrah* (1991) produced?

KK: Toho conducted a survey which showed that *Mothra* was women's favorite monster. The studio couldn't ignore this. Besides, it would have been too easy to bring *Ghidrah* back. (The survey showed that *Ghidrah* and *MechaGodzilla* were men's favorite monsters.)

CM: Toho recently gave some consideration to producing a movie in which *Godzilla* was going to face *MechaniKong*, but the studio could not obtain permission to use the robot. What was the film going to be like? (*MechaniKong* appears in *King Kong Escapes* (1967).)

KK: Toho wanted to pit *Godzilla* against *King Kong* because *King Kong Vs. Godzilla* (1962) was very successful. However, the studio thought that obtaining permission to use *King Kong* would be very difficult. So, it instead decided to use *MechaniKong*. Soon afterward, it was discovered that obtaining permission even to use the likeness of *King Kong* would be difficult. So, the project was cancelled. (*King Kong Vs. Godzilla* was more successful in Japan than any of the other *Godzilla* movies.)

*MechaniKong* was going to have injectors. A number of people were going to be injected into

*Godzilla* while the robot was wrestling with him. They then were going to do battle with *Godzilla* from within while *MechaniKong* continued to do battle with him from without.

There were going to be many different strange worlds inside *Godzilla*. The concept was very much like the one on which *Fantastic Voyage* (1966) was based.

CM: Have there been any other science fiction films proposed by Toho since the release of *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* that were not produced?

KK: Many were planned. Toho did produce *Sayonara Jupiter*, *Gunhed* and *Yamato Takeru*, but they didn't do as well as the *Godzilla* movies. I would like to work on something other than *Godzilla* films during the summer, but Toho keeps insisting that we make a new one every year. (All of the *Godzilla* movies for which Mr. Kawakita directed the special effects were shot during the summer.)

CM: You began working for Toho in 1962. In what capacity did you work back then?

KK: I worked in the matte photography department. (It creates composite footage.)

CM: When did you begin working in the optical department? (It creates radioactive breath, electrical rays and so on.)

KK: Three or four years later.

CM: You worked as an assistant director on *Godzilla Vs. The Smog Monster* (1971). Did you work with the standard staff or the special effects staff?

KK: I generally worked with the special effects staff after being promoted to assistant director, but I occasionally worked with the standard staff. I worked with both on *Godzilla Vs. The Smog Monster*. (Mr. Kawakita also worked on *The Last Days Of Planet Earth* (1974), *The War In Space* (1977) and several other movies as an assistant director.)

CM: Were the production budgets for the *Godzilla* films made during the 1970s much smaller than those for the *Godzilla* movies that are now being made? (A large amount of stock footage was inserted into both *Godzilla Vs. Gigan* (1972) and *Godzilla Vs. Megalon* (1973).)

KK: They were half as large.

CM: How is your professional relationship with Takao Okawara different from the one you have with Kazuki Omori? (Mr. Okawara directed *Godzilla Vs. Mothra*, *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla* and *Yamato Takeru*.)

KK: Mr. Omori is very creative. He revises scripts even during shooting. I very much admire Mr. Omori because of his creativity. Mr. Okawara, on the other hand, is more of a craftsman. He knows how to make films.

CM: Was the manner in which you worked with Kenshou Yamashita on *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* any different from the one in which you worked with him on *Nineteen* (1987)? (Mr. Yamashita directed both movies.)

KK: The two films are very different from each other. *Nineteen* is a teen idol movie. However, the manner in which we worked with each other did not change very much. Our intentions both times were to attract young people and take a new approach.

CM: Do you edit the footage you direct or do the directors with whom you work do that?

KK: The directors have the right to make the final decisions, but I generally edit the footage. The directors usually will take part in editing it only if the running time of the entire film is too short or too long.

CM: You directed the special effects for a number of episodes of several different science fiction television series. How was that different from working on movies? (Among the series Mr. Kawakita worked on are *Ultraman Ace* (1972-1973),

(continued)

*Meteor Man Zone* (1973), *Ultraman Taro* (1973), *Megaro Man* (1979) and *Ultraman 80* (1980).)

KK: The schedule was very tight. We had only five days to shoot the special effects footage for each episode. We would spend three days shooting the set and the monsters by themselves, one day shooting the monsters wrestling with each other and one day shooting everything else.

CM: Exactly how much footage would you shoot for each episode?

KK: One episode of *Ultraman Ace* consists of about six hundred cuts. The special effects footage consists of about two hundred cuts. (Episodes of *Ultraman Ace* are half an hour long.)

CM: You worked with Ishiro Honda on *Meteor Man Zone*. What was that like? (Mr. Honda directed a number of the episodes in the series. He also directed *Godzilla — King Of The Monsters* (1954), *Destroy All Monsters* (1968), *Terror Of Mechagodzilla* and many of the other science fiction films produced by Toho.)

KK: I was very excited about working with Mr. Honda. I felt honored. He allowed me to do my own work. Even now I enjoy watching the episodes Mr. Honda and I worked on together.

CM: How long did it take to shoot the footage for *Monster Planet — Godzilla*? (It is an amusement park ride that features Godzilla, Mothra and Rodan.)

KK: Just over one month. (The ride lasts for five minutes.)

CM: Which of the older science fiction films produced by Toho are you favorites?

KK: I like all of them, but I especially like *The Mysterians* and *Rodan*.

CM: Which of the movies you worked on as a special effects director is your favorite?

KK: *Samurai Of The Big Sky*.

CM: Why is that?

KK: It's the first film on which I worked as a special effects director. In addition, I was given complete artistic control. I'm especially proud of *Samurai Of The Big Sky* because there is no stock footage in it. There have been many war movies produced by Toho, but most of them feature stock footage. There is very little stock footage of Zero fighters in widescreen format, so although the producers wanted me to use stock footage, I insisted that I be allowed to use only new footage.

CM: Do you enjoy working on science fiction films any more or less than you enjoy working on the war movies?

KK: I prefer working on war films because the characters in them can be very expressive, even when they are only relating with weapons.

CM: What do you think of the Gamera movies?

KK: I haven't seen the older ones, but I did see a rush edit of the new one and I think it's fine. (*Gamera — Giant Monster Decisive Air Battle* was released in Japan in March.)

CM: What do you think of the Ultraman television series?

KK: Ultraman, like Godzilla, is too perfect. It's impossible to move away from him. A different approach should be taken, but I know that it's very difficult to do so.

CM: How did you like *Jurassic Park* (1993)?

KK: I enjoyed the film, but it was too realistic. It would have been much more enjoyable if some fantasy elements had been incorporated into it.

CM: What do you think the next few Godzilla movies produced by Toho should be like?

KK: The Godzilla series has lasted for 40 years. Whenever we produce a new Godzilla film, we keep that in mind. We also produce each new Godzilla movie with the expectation that the series will continue on for another 40 years.

CM: Is there anything you are allowed to say about the next Godzilla film Toho is going to produce? (Godzilla will be killed in *Godzilla Vs. Destroyer*, which is scheduled to be released in Japan in December.)

KK: The drama will center around the destruction of Tokyo.

CM: Will Little Godzilla continue to grow?

KK: Yes. He will grow into Junior Godzilla.

CM: Is another amusement park ride featuring Godzilla going to be produced in the near future?

KK: There is going to be another one produced, but it will not be a sequel to *Monster Planet — Godzilla*. It instead will feature an entirely new story.

CM: How do you feel about TriStar Pictures producing a Godzilla film in the United States?

KK: I have great expectations for the movie. I'm looking forward to seeing it not only because I direct special effects for Godzilla films, but also because I am a movie fan. ■

## SELLING GODZILLA

by David Milner

Over the past 70 years, motion picture distributors gradually have developed a number of standard techniques that they use to promote their films. These include running trailers in theaters, airing commercials on television and radio, placing advertisements in newspapers and magazines and inviting critics to preview screenings. Some distributors developed much more elaborate methods of increasing box office receipts, but few were more creative than those trying to publicize Japanese monster movies in the United States.

American International Pictures (AIP), for example, suggested that, in order to promote *Godzilla vs. The Thing* (1964), managers of theaters in which the film was playing should "spot all places where buildings have been wrecked or razed... or where pre-construction digging is going on and post signs on surrounding fences reading: 'Godzilla fought the Thing here.'" American International also recommended that "wrecked or totally demolished cars" be placed near theaters in which *Destroy All Monsters* (1968) was playing "with cards attached reading: 'A Victim of *Destroy All Monsters*.'" "Upon special request to Cinema Shares representatives, giant full color cut-outs of the four monsters" in *Godzilla vs. Megalon* (1973) would be sent to theater managers. The cut-outs were made to fit on Volkswagen Beetles, and arrangements could be made for cars to be provided by Volkswagen dealers so that a convoy could be formed. "This can be a huge promotional plus for your theater, but it requires a lot of advance planning and work. You can have your local officials declare 'Monster Day' and have a parade, or use the convoy to visit shopping centers, or at sports events, etc."

Often distributors trying to publicize Japanese monster movies would attempt to plant articles about them in newspapers and magazines. For example, as part of Continental's publicity campaign for *Ghidrah — The Three-Headed Monster* (1964), the company offered a piece entitled "New Monster Proves Three Heads Better Than One" in which Shinichi Sekizawa, who wrote not only *Ghidrah — The Three-Headed Monster*, but also *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962), *Godzilla vs. Monster Zero* (1965) and many other science fiction films, was referred to as "an expert on the extra-curricular activities of delinquent monsters."

Photographs with brief captions printed underneath them customarily were sent out along with the articles. The caption to one of the photographs circulated to promote *Godzilla vs. The Smog Monster* (1971) read "Menaced by Muck — Hiroyuki Kawase and Toshie Kumura flee before the menace of Hedorah, a gigantic living blob of sludge which rose from the polluted waters of a city to threaten the world in *Godzilla vs. The Smog Monster*," and the caption to a photograph used to publicize *Yog — Monster From Space* (1970) read "Battle of the Behemoths — A not-so-jolly green giant octopus and a king-sized turtle struggle for supremacy in... *Yog — Monster From Space*."

Distributors of Japanese monster movies sometimes sought tie-ins with local merchants. For example, American International came up with the idea that exterminators should be encouraged to use the line "We Destroy All Monsters Too..." but not the variety seen in... *Destroy All Monsters*" in their advertising. AIP also came up with the idea that in order to promote *Godzilla vs. The Smog Monster*, bar owners should be urged to "create a new mixed drink labeled the 'Godzilla cocktail... it clears that five o'clock smog from your brain.'" Continental created a Ghidrah mask to publicize *Ghidrah — The Three-Headed Monster*, and the company encouraged radio announcers to "request that listeners send in a wrapper or box top" from whatever products were being advertised in exchange for a "free full-color mask of *Ghidrah — The Three-Headed Monster*!" Continental also recommended that managers of theaters in which *Ghidrah — The Three-Headed Monster* was playing

"check (their) local supermarket. They may be running large ads for a big sale coming up. This is an excellent way to reach the reader's eye with an illustration of the mask and copy that says 'The Two Biggest Events in Town... Blank Market's Giant Sale and *Ghidrah — The Three-Headed Monster*.'"

In the interest of promoting *Godzilla vs. The Smog Monster*, American International pointed out that "a very pertinent and eye-catching three-dimensional display can be created in (theater lobbies) by setting up cutouts of the monster figures from posters over a mound of rubbish with tin cans and bottles so that the smog monster rises from the heap." Ten years earlier, Columbia had suggested that radioactive material be put on display in the lobby of theaters in which *Mothra* (1961) was playing.

All of these methods of publicizing Japanese monster movies had their merits, but they weren't always successful. So, AIP recommended simply taking out advertisements in the classifieds. "Classify your monsters in the classified section! Wanted — Men, Women or Young Adults to Help *Destroy All Monsters*!"

### The Ballade Of Calypso Jenkins A new video

Starring Conrad Brooks

Also starring E. Warren Hopf  
and Lora Moss Hall.

Directed by Michael Martin  
& Ellsworth Hall

Music by Ellsworth Hall

An H&H Video Production, 1995

To order send \$19.95 to

Conrad Brooks

12200 Brookfield Ave

Hagerstown MD 21740.



# CULT MOVIE STUFF

by Buddy Barnett

Welcome to the *Cult Movies* bulletin board; the place where we tell you about cool stuff that you can buy or go to see. In every issue of *Cult Movies* we will pass on info about books, magazines, CDs, tapes, videos and all kinds of cult movie related merchandise that catch our fancy. We'll also let you know about upcoming events and movies for you to attend.

First, I'd like to let you know about some stuff that you can get directly from us at *Cult Movies*:

*The Phantom Ship* starring Bela Lugosi and released by Bosko Video. *The Phantom Ship* is a well-made, atmospheric little melodrama produced by Hammer Pictures (one of their earliest films) in 1935. Bela Lugosi has an offbeat, dramatic role as a derelict seaman in this one. The film was made in England and features characters uttering curse words that were just not used in American movies of the period.

Previous video and television prints of *The Phantom Ship* were in deplorable condition with bad sound and scratchy dark murky images. However, Bosko Video has unearthed an original 35mm American release print of this Lugosi movie. The picture and sound quality is the best that I have ever seen on this title. The film is presented in a beautiful sepia-toned tint and letterboxed so that the viewer can see the film exactly as it was seen in the theatres during the 1930s. Also included on the program is the 1930 cartoon *The Haunted Ship*.

*The Phantom Ship* is available from *Cult Movies* for \$16.00 plus \$2.00 shipping. Make checks payable to *Cult Movies*, 6201 Sunset Blvd. Suite 152 Hollywood CA 90028.

*Bluebeard* with John Carradine is considered to be one of director Edgar G. Ulmer's best films along with *The Black Cat* and *Detour*. PRC produced this picture in 1944 and the film is filled with many artistic touches courtesy of director Ulmer. The film also features John Carradine in one of his best roles; his skidrow, theatrical hamminess really fits this part.

*Cult Movies* has a good video print of *Bluebeard* for \$12.99 plus \$2.00 shipping. Make checks payable to *Cult Movies*, 6201 Sunset Blvd. Suite 152 Hollywood CA 90028.

If you enjoyed our coverage on George Reeves and Superman in this issue we think you'll love our book on the original Superboy and Superpup. This special book includes the full story on the Superboy and Superpup TV pilots with complete production histories; a biography of Superman producer Whitney Ellsworth; plus many rare photos of George Reeves as well, all for just \$9.95 plus \$2.00 shipping. Send check or money order payable to *Cult Movies* 6201 Sunset Blvd. Suite 152 Hollywood CA 90028.

Ed Wood has always been a popular personality with *Cult Movies*' readers and we've got a few new things available in addition to our popular videos and magazines. We have some fantastic 8x10 still sets from several Ed Wood movies. Each set comes with five different stills from a particular movie. The available movies are: *Glen Or Glenda?*, we have five different sets of five stills on *Glen Or Glenda?* (each set is different for a total of 25 individual shots); *Jail Bait*, one set of five stills; *Bride Of The Monster*, one set of five stills; *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, three different sets of five stills (a total of fifteen different stills); *Orgy Of The Dead*, one set of five stills. Each set of five stills sells for \$20.00 post paid. Please specify title of set desired when ordering. You can also purchase all eleven sets (55 total stills) for the discount price of \$175.00, which is \$45.00 off the regular price if purchased individually! Send check or money order payable to *Cult Movies* 6201 Sunset Blvd. Suite 152 Hollywood CA 90028.

Another great item that *Cult Movies* has unearthed for all of you Ed Wood cultists is the only known remaining portion of the black scenery backdrop used to simulate the nighttime sky in *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, shot at little Quality Studios in Hollywood. We are selling pieces of the backdrop mounted onto a certificate of authenticity signed by the amazing Conrad Brooks and myself. These little gems are ready for framing and each one comes with a still from the movie.

This is truly a limited collectors item; props, scenery or costumes from *Plan 9* are almost impossible to find. You



Conrad Brooks in *The Ballade of Calypso Jenkins*

can't afford to pass up this important piece of movie history! The cost for this collectors piece is only \$19.95 plus \$2.00 shipping. Send check or money order payable to *Cult Movies* 6201 Sunset Blvd. Suite 152 Hollywood CA 90028.

Speaking of Quality Studios, the amazing Conrad Brooks has just finished directing his first movie since 1960. It's called *Vampire Wolf* and over 60% of the actual filming was done at the old Quality Studios in Hollywood. Conrad told me "Buddy, I shot in every corner and hallway of this studio. I practically got every inch of the studio in my movie. I know fans of Ed Wood and *Plan 9* will be just as interested in seeing Quality studio as they will be in my vampire movie!"

Conrad's movie features a weird and interesting cast of characters along with some beautiful girls. His acting troupe includes Don Miller, Jennifer Knight, Mike Hooker, Annette Perez, and Peacha. Conrad even got people like Joe Estevez (*Baby Ghost*) and Mighty Ducks' hockey player Jim Thompson to cameo in his feature.

Conrad says: "This picture is somewhat of a satire of the old Monogram and PRC pictures of days gone by and is dedicated to my old pal Ed Wood." I was on the set for several days with Conrad and his producer Al Guerrero and I thought Conrad was doing a fine job as director. The whole cast and crew were really into the spirit of the thing. In our next issue we'll have a pictorial feature on this instant cult classic, and hopefully you'll be able to get this on video from *Cult Movies* in the near future.

Conrad is also featured in a new video called *The Ballade Of Calypso Jenkins*, a 71-minute movie about a half black/half white man who uses mesmerism and black-magic to hasten the end of the Civil War. Calypso Jenkins is a cryptic, pseudo-historical melodrama, often very confusing but intriguing at the same time.

Calypso Jenkins has a beautiful music score and makes use of some excellent Civil War battle reenactments to augment the meagre budget. The production looks fairly decent, somewhat along the lines of an old Educational TV broadcast. Conrad Brooks has a good supporting role as Colonel Truxton, a man who turns out to be Calypso Jenkins' half brother. Conrad has a nice little scene at the end of the picture as an old man musing over past events.

The movie features E. Warren Hopf and Lora Moss Hall. Conrad's family: Ruth Brooks, Connie Granda and Garrett Granda even took small parts in the production. To order send \$19.95 to Conrad Brooks 12200 Brookfield Ave Hagerstown MD 21740. Also available from Conrad

is his trash classic *Conrad Brooks Vs The Werewolf* directed by Rocky Nelson. Send \$15.95 to Conrad Brooks at the above address. With every order of *Conrad Brooks Vs The Werewolf*, Conrad will send you a free autographed 8x10 photo.

By the way, Conrad Brooks' first directed film was the award-winning, critically acclaimed short subject *Mystery In Shadows*. You can get *Mystery In Shadows* from us at *Cult Movies* as part of the video compilation *Hellborn: The Best Of Cult Movies*. In addition to *Mystery In Shadows*, this video compilation includes Ed Wood's unfinished masterpiece *Hellborn* and an Ed Wood directed two-reel Western in 1948 featuring Conrad Brooks and his brothers Henry and Ted. *Hellborn: The Best Of Cult Movies* is available for \$19.95 plus \$2.50 shipping. Send check or money order payable to *Cult Movies* 6201 Sunset Blvd. Suite 152 Hollywood CA 90028.

I've just seen the best Boris Karloff T-shirt ever and it's available from Sara Karloff at Karloff Enterprises. The shirt is black and features a fantastic shot of Karloff as the Mummy. The Karloff image is available in grey or sepia-tone. Buy one of each to wear according to your mood. All sizes are available. You can order from Karloff Enterprises for \$23 plus \$3.00 shipping per shirt. Send check or money order payable to Karloff Enterprises P.O. Box 2424, Rancho Mirage, CA 92270. Sara has a lot of other great Karloff stuff for sale, so be sure and ask for her list.

Speaking of Karloff; A&E cable channel has just completed a segment of their popular program *Biography* featuring Boris Karloff's life story. Sara Karloff and *Cult Movies*' Ron Borst were both involved in the production. A&E is also doing Bela Lugosi's life as well and that one is being put together by famous author David Skal with the cooperation of Bela Lugosi, Jr. Look for both of these productions in October.

*G-Fan*, the fanzine for G-Force The Godzilla society of North America is looking better and better with every issue. They now feature slick covers with original artwork of giant Japanese monsters. Each issue is packed with information about Japanese fantasy films along with updates about all the current films being released. *Cult Movies* recommends this publication very highly. Subscription prices are \$18.00 (U.S. funds) for 6 issues. Overseas orders add \$2.00 per issue. Send to Daikaju Enterprises, Box 3468, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada R0A 2A0. Tell 'em that *Cult Movies* sent you.

Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski have just had their *Ed Wood* screenplay published by Faber and Faber. The screenplay is illustrated with photos from the movie and is printed as a slightly oversized paperback edition selling in the U.S. for \$12.95. The screenplay features many scenes cut from the film including a great scene where Lugosi and Ed Wood go to visit Dr. Manly Hall at the Philosophical Research Society.

Buy the book to see what you are missing from the release version. Hopefully, an extended version of the film will someday be released on laser or video. Scott and Larry's book is a must for Lugosi and Ed Wood fans; ask for it at your local book store.

Worrybird Records has just released a new CD called *Stock Footage, Music From The Films Of Roger Corman*. The CD features several bizarre versions of musical scores from Corman's movies. Some of the films featured are *Bucket Of Blood*, *Candy Strips Nurse*, *Creature From The Haunted Sea* & *It Conquered The World*.

Some of the strange musical groups who contributed to this CD are: Plan 9, Man Or Astroman and Space Negroes. *Cult Movies*' own Johnny Legend performs a novelty song called "Teenage Caveman" written by Zacherle. It's probably the best track on the CD. The informative liner notes are by director Fred Olen Ray. Write for information from Worrybird P.O. Box 95485 Atlanta GA.

That's all for this issue; if you have a product that you'd like mentioned in these pages, please write to me, Buddy Barnett at *Cult Movies* 6201 Sunset Blvd. Suite 152 Hollywood CA 90028.

# Loretta King Interview

by **Buddy Barnett**



"As far as directing goes, Bela Lugosi gave me a lot more direction than Ed Wood ever did." — Loretta King.

Loretta King, the leading lady in Ed Wood's *Bride of the Monster*, starring Bela Lugosi, has been one of the most elusive of all the Ed Wood co-workers. Until now, she's been on record in only a couple of paragraphs in Rudolph Grey's biography of Ed Wood, *Nightmare Of Ecstasy*.

With the recent release of Tim Burton's biopic *Ed Wood*, and with just about everybody who ever knew Ed Wood coming out of the woodwork (pun intended), Loretta King Hadler (married name) decided that it was about time to go on record with her story.

Even though Loretta loved Tim Burton's *Ed Wood*, and thoroughly enjoyed Juliet Landau's performance as 'Loretta King,' she did want to set

the record straight on some of the inaccuracies of the film.

She shared some interesting recollections with us about Bela Lugosi, Ed Wood and the making of *Bride Of The Monster*. We think that you will enjoy what she has to say in the following pages.

Earlier this year, thanks to the assistance of close family friends Eric and Lisa Caidin, Ken Schacter and myself were granted an interview with Loretta and she proved to be an interesting and gracious woman. In fact, she was one of the nicest people that I've ever had the pleasure of interviewing.

*Cult Movies:* How did you come to be involved

in Ed Wood's *Bride Of The Monster*?

Loretta King: The way that I came to be in *Bride Of The Monster* was like this, and this is the factual story: First of all, I had a scholarship at Gellar Theatre for three years. They needed sort of a leading lady type for all of these different plays. I worked with them for three years, very happily, this was all scholarship.

After I did that I went to the Coronet Theatre, a theater that Charles Laughton had started. And that was almost professional. Gellar was learning, but Coronet was the next level up. I was doing a play called *Galatea*, which was the Pygmalion story, but it was the classic one, the original.

So, these were all professional actors in this and I had very wonderful reviews on that and the producer said, "Loretta, you got the best reviews of any young girl in town."

So then, these two ladies called me, they had opened an agency on Hollywood Blvd. I didn't have an agent. As far as I was concerned, I was a student. But they said to come and see them as they had something in mind for me. So I went down to this agency and these two women were there and they told me that they were casting. And when they saw me they really thought that I would be right for this movie.

And I said, "What movie is that?" And they told me Ed Wood's name, and it didn't mean anything to me. I didn't know Ed Wood's name at all. But I said fine and they said you will have to come back at about 1:30 or 2 o'clock. And she said, "By the way, do you have any Angora sweaters?" And I said, "No but I have cashmere." And she said, "Well if you don't have Angora then wear the cashmere sweater."

So I went home and put on the sweater and went back to the office and Ed Wood was there. He was a very handsome, very nice man and he looked through my book of my credits and where I had studied. He said, "I don't see any reason why not. I'd like to have a stage actress in this movie, somebody who could remember her lines."

Well I know now why! Because he never stopped the film going! He just started the film and you either remembered, or you just stood there. And you're not thinking about what you are doing, you are just thinking about delivering the next line. You're not thinking about anything else.

So, anyway, Ed Wood said, "Great, we'll call you." And the ladies asked me to sign with them because Ed Wood was going to use most of their people. I guess he had made a deal with them. Of course I'd heard that story before, but I signed anyway and forgot about it for awhile. But they actually called a short time later with news that the film was going to be shooting soon.

They told me to be ready and that they were going to be shooting the first scenes in Griffith Park. I was living in Santa Monica at the time, so I went to Griffith Park. And I will never forget we were going to shoot a night scene and it was the daytime. In this scene I was supposed to be driving frantically through the forest and Ed Wood strapped himself to the roof of the car and he had a watering can, because it's supposed to be raining. I'm driving 'hell-bent for leather' and Ed Wood is pouring this water all over the windshield and I can hardly see. I just didn't know what to think.

The thing about Ed Wood was that you could never get really angry with him, because he was so naive and so enthusiastic. He just loved movies.

CM: Do you remember anything about the giant octopus in *Bride Of The Monster*?

LK: About the octopus, I do remember that they put this poor thing, the rubber was dead in it, and they attached wires to it. Oh Lord, this must have been one o'clock in the morning. I was so tired standing there freezing. And they were juggling

**CULT MOVIES**



the legs. Bela was there too, but they had a double doing most of the hard work. Bela did some, mostly the close-ups though.

You know I finally got up the nerve to go see the Tim Burton movie *Ed Wood* the other night. I thought it was quite wonderful, of course, it's not factual in so many instances, but that was okay. The scene with Bela Lugosi wrestling with the octopus was wonderful. Tim Burton didn't show the guys manipulating the wires, like in the original, but it really wasn't necessary.

Then, of course, we had the atom bomb explosion and I'm watching it with Tony McCoy and Tony McCoy running around in his torn t-shirt. The scenes where Lugosi's double is supposed to pick me up and they had a dummy and nothing looks phonier than that. It was pretty funny.

CM: Didn't Ed Wood shut down the filming at times for financial reasons?

LK: Yes he did. We did a few scenes and then stopped filming for several weeks. Ed told me that he would get in touch with me when they got more money. So I told him that I was going to Arizona for a while and gave him my number there. I went to Arizona where my family was and pretty soon I got a call from Ed. This had to be a good six weeks or two months since we had last shot anything and Ed said come back to Hollywood, we're shooting at 6:30 Monday morning.

This was Friday when he called and to drive from Phoenix to Los Angeles in those days took a good 10 or 11 hours. I said to my mother, "I hope I can find that darn script, because I've got to know that whole thing by Monday morning." I drove home Saturday and spent all day Sunday studying that scene in the detective's office.

So I got to the studio on Monday and the first scene is me coming through the office door and Ed Wood had a couple of chalk marks on the floor. It was a master shot. I knew then he was never going to stop the camera. And this fellow Harvey Dunn was there. He was a familiar face to me. I'd seen him on television. He had a little bird that he always carried on his shoulder. It was kind of cute. He was the chief of police in this movie and I was a newspaperwoman. So, I came through that door and started my lines talking to him and it went on and on and on. I could have done a three act play if Ed had had the film for it.

But anyway, he finally said "Cut! Print!" I thought, "God, that's it?" Usually you would stop for a close-up or a medium shot and you'd have to look over your lines and think about it, but not with Ed, there was no time for thinking, you just rattle on and on. We did all that and I was so glad that I could get through it. Who thinks about what it means? But Ed was very nice. The studio was up on Yucca and Argyle, so I moved into the Knickerbocker Hotel so that we would be in walking distance to the studio. We must have shot there for a couple of weeks.

CM: It sounds like he didn't give much direction.

LK: I don't know why he didn't give more direction. He would give directions as far as the camera placement. But it was non-stop dialogue and he never told you how to play a scene. I guess he figured, you're an actor you know what to do. I was just thinking that I hope I can remember these lines and he was probably thinking about how many scenes he had to do that day.

That scene in the *Ed Wood* movie where Tor Johnson ran into the set trying to get through the door and Ed yells "Cut! Print!" That was literally true. I remember thinking that he could do a second take but he never did. One of his favorite expressions was "It was fine. Print it." That was Ed's style.

As far as directing goes, Bela Lugosi gave me a lot more direction in our scenes together than Ed



Bela Lugosi and Loretta King in Ed Wood's *Bride Of The Monster*.

Wood ever did. We would talk together before our scenes as to what we were going to do in the scene.

CM: How do you suppose that those stories got started that Ed Wood thought that you were going to finance *Bride Of The Monster*?

LK: In the *Ed Wood* movie they claimed that Ed Wood thought I was going to put up the money for *Bride Of The Monster* and I gave him \$300, which was supposedly all the money I had in the world. And then he needed \$60,000 from me and I didn't have it. That was all untrue, but I'll tell you how these stories came about.



A couple of years ago I got a call from Rudolph Grey, the guy who wrote that *Ed Wood* book. He was calling from New York, he said he wanted to talk to me about *Bride Of The Monster* and he said to me, "You and Bela were the two most professional on that movie." I said, "I thought Harvey Dunn was pretty good, but I don't think I was very professional." He said, "Yes, you were, but you know I heard Dolores Fuller say that you had paid for your part." Now that was the first I had ever heard of that. Nobody had ever told me that before. I said to him, "I can only tell you that isn't true. First of all, I'm insecure enough, that if I didn't get a role for any reason, I just don't have the confidence, so if I would have had to pay for it I would never have been able to do it."

He then said, "I think I know why Dolores

Fuller said that. I think Ed Wood told her that." Now those two ladies that ran the agency told me that Ed Wood had used his girlfriend (Dolores) in his other pictures, but for this one he wanted an experienced actress. I know she's talented, she's written songs and all that, but at that time she wasn't as experienced. He just needed to have somebody else in the film this time.

Well, at this time as I told you I was living with my mother and I'm sleeping, and I've been working very hard and had to get up early. And the phone rings at four in the morning, and this voice says to me, "Well how do you like doing the role that I was supposed to have?" I was somewhat confused at this hour and asked, "Who is this?" she said, "Well, you know who it is. You took my role." I said, "Dolores Fuller?" You see, I hadn't really spoken to her before. We never really had a chance to talk to each other. As fast as Ed worked, you never really had much time to sit around talking. She said, "Yes, can you imagine how I feel?" I said, "Dolores, I had two agents who had me meet him and he seemed to be needing somebody for the part." I told her that I was sure that she would be doing other parts, and then I told her a little about my stage background in things like *The Petrified Forest*, *Mr. Roberts* and *Sabrina Fair*. She became very nice and more understanding after this, but I guess she didn't believe me about how I got the role because of what she told Rudolph Grey years later.

Well, what did happen, as far as money goes, Tony McCoy's father came on the set. By the way, he was nothing at all like the man in the movie *Ed Wood*; he was a very nice man from the Midwest. He was a businessman and I dare say he put some of the money up for the film. After that I noticed that Tony McCoy's name always came ahead of mine in the publicity, always right with Bela's.

CM: What was it like working with Bela Lugosi?

LK: It was wonderful. He was a real Old World gentleman. When we did the scene in *Bride Of The Monster* where he hypnotizes me, Bela told me after the scene, "You know, I really like you because you really look into someone's eyes when their talking to you. Other actresses just look to the side, but you give a person something to work with."

You know, I never heard him use a single curse

(continued)

word. He was an elegant gentleman. I went down to visit him in the hospital when he was ill and the reporters were there and everybody just loved the man. Ed Wood just worshipped him. I got the impression that Ed would have walked off the ends of the world for Bela.

Bela was pretty far down at the time. I drove him home one day after work. He was living in an apartment, it was off of Sunset Blvd. It was a very nice, brand new apartment. He just seemed to take life in stride, in a way. Of course, I knew he had the drug problem. But, he was so cute about it when he was in the hospital. He said, "When I get unhooked I'll get out of here." He was in good spirits, but he was advanced in age and he told me that his wife had run off with Brian Donlevy. But like I said, he seemed to take everything in stride.

In the movie *Ed Wood*, they showed how Lugosi resented Boris Karloff and how they had this thing between them. Bela never mentioned Karloff to me; however, I used to study acting with Florence Enright, she was the drama coach at RKO. She used to go over lines with Karloff and Lugosi when they were doing films at RKO and she said that they had a real rivalry. She used to say that she could get one to work harder by threatening him with the other one.

CM: I know that it was a fast shooting schedule on *Bride Of The Monster*, but did you enjoy doing your scenes with Bela Lugosi?

LK: You know, if there had really been a little time taken in the direction; but that didn't really matter with Bela because he *knew* what he was doing. When we were doing the scene by the tea table, he was so good that I felt he really gave me a lot to work with in the scene.

CM: Do you remember anything about Tor Johnson?

LK: He was sweet. When they put me on the operating table in *Bride*, they had me in these incredibly uncomfortable handcuffs, and in the scene Tor comes to tear them off. He was a sweet dear man, but here he was nearly breaking my arm



Bride Of The Monster

taking off these handcuffs.

CM: After *Bride Of The Monster*, you went on to do a live broadcast TV version of "Fall Of The House Of Usher" for *Matinee Theatre* on NBC.

LK: I think that when I went into read for "Fall Of The House Of Usher," the fact that I had been in a Bela Lugosi film helped me get the part.

The director was Boris Sagal. He directed many shows on TV, and later died tragically in an accident while filming a TV movie. Well, anyway, he was the director for this *Matinee Theatre*; these were the first, hour long, color, live shows at 12 noon on NBC. You really had to have a memory to get through these shows because it was broadcast live.

Tom Tyron, who later became a famous author, and Marshall Thompson co-starred in this show with me. I played Madeline and during this show I'm buried alive and just before the commercial they had a scene of my hand coming out of the coffin. After they broke for the commercial, the

crew just left me in the coffin and moved onto another scene. It was kind of funny.

After the show was broadcast, Harvey Dunn told me that Ed Wood saw it and asked everybody, "How come Loretta didn't do a job for me like that?" And they all said, "Because she had a director and a photographer on 'House Of Usher.'" (laughs).

I ended up doing three shows for *Matinee Theatre* and I really enjoyed it.

CM: Do you have any other comments about Ed Wood?

LK: I wonder why Ed drank so heavily. He never showed disappointment about his films. He was undaunted, he was just undaunted. You see actresses like that, they don't hear anything bad, anything that's negative. He might have been disappointed down deep, but he never showed it. But maybe it was this fetish (cross-dressing) that he had that caused the drinking.

He was very loyal to people, I thought, to people like Lugosi who he tried to help over and over. I don't think Ed Wood was a shallow person. There was nothing phony about Ed Wood, he never tried to be something that he wasn't, and when he told me I had the part in *Bride Of The Monster* that day in the agent's office, I had the part. I could show you a lot of people in this town that are so respected, yet you can't believe a word that they say.

CM: Did you ever regret getting out of acting?

LK: Director Boris Sagal used to get impatient with me about my lack of ambition. He said, "Here, you've just done a good show with 'House Of Usher' and we've got another one coming up and you're always running off to Arizona with your mother or somewhere like that. You have to strike when the iron is hot." But I didn't care (laughs). I'm happy.

(Special thanks for this article must go to Ken Schacter for assisting me with the interview, to Lisa and Eric Caidin for making it possible, and most of all to Loretta King Hadler for her graciousness and hospitality.)

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# THE FANTASTIC WORLD OF JEAN ROLLIN

by Michael Copner

French director Jean Rollin has certainly established a world-wide reputation as a horror film creator, a specialist at blending sensuality (usually lesbianism) with vampirism. He has thereby dreamed into reality a world every bit as unique and identifiable as have such diverse fantasists as H.P. Lovecraft or Jess Franco. The American reputation of Mr. Rollin may rest most strongly on three films, all of which were dubbed into English and picked up by Harry Novak for American distribution through his Boxoffice International Productions.

*Requiem For A Vampire* (released in America as *Caged Vampires*, and later as *Caged Virgins*) is a tale of two girls who come upon a castle that happens to be occupied by a strange vampire and a variety of ghastly corpses. Novak states that, of all his European import films, this one did the most excellent business in adult houses for many years.

*The Nude Vampire*, made in 1969, is Rollin's second vampire fantasy, and mixes horror, science fiction elements, and sex. The following year Rollin directed *Thrill Of The Vampire*, another sadistic nudie film with an alarming dungeon nipple-torture bondage scene. Both of these were picked up for theatrical exhibition by Harry Novak, and are available for home consumption via Something Weird Video.

At this point I'll expose myself by stating that I prefer dubbed films to those that are subtitled. Since film is a visual medium, I prefer to look at a movie rather than read it as titles flash by. I realize that I may just have shattered whatever reputation I may have had with film purists; many serious fans do not appreciate the cartoonish, out-of-synch voices that get thrown onto foreign films and they'll not even watch a dubbed film if a subtitled version is available. But I stick to my guns! Reading is reading, and that's not the same thing as viewing a picture, or a moving series of them. With that in mind, I've enjoyed these three Jean Rollin films in their American versions, and am glad Harry Novak kept them available all these years.

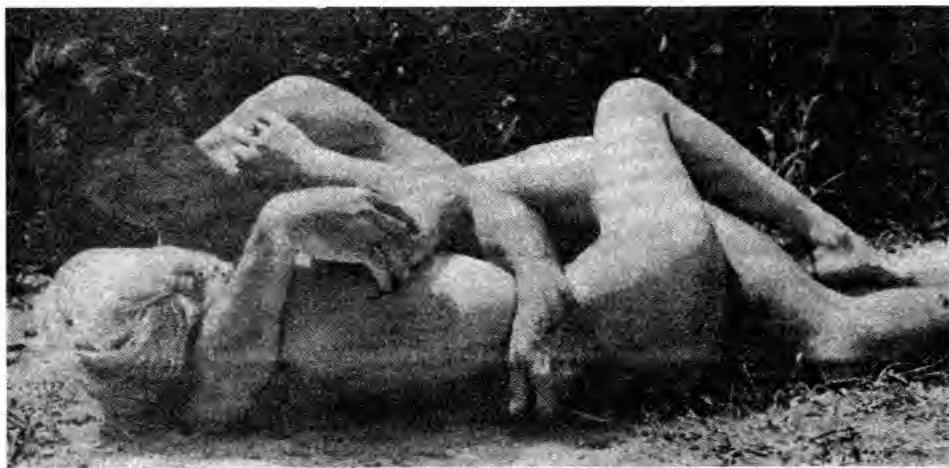
Yet having said all this, I'm still delighted to announce that all the Rollin films are soon to be available for the first time on VHS tape, courtesy of the fine folks at Video Search of Miami. Through their exclusive arrangement with Jean Rollin, all his pictures (roughly 30 feature films) will become available in their original French versions, subtitled in English—and in some cases also in a new English language version. Each of these will carry an "in person" videotaped introduction to the film by Jean Rollin himself! In these introductions, directed and photographed for Videosearch by



Three scary scenes from the Jean Rollin film *Requiem For A Vampire* (aka *Caged Virgins*). All of Jean Rollin's films are soon to be available for the first time on VHS tape, courtesy of Video Search of Miami. Through their exclusive arrangement with Jean Rollin, all of his roughly 30 feature films will become available in their original French versions, subtitled in English—and in some cases also in a new English language version. Each of these will carry an "in person" videotaped introduction to the film by Jean Rollin himself. In these introductions, directed and photographed for Videosearch by Peter Blumenstock, Mr. Rollin talks about how each one came about, and gives us insight to the production of each film.







Requiem For A Vampire (aka Caged Virgins).



Fascination.

Peter Blumenstock, Mr. Rollin talks about how each one came about, and gives us insight to the production of each film.

Among the first of these new releases is *Raisins De La Mort* (*Raisins Of Death*). Generally considered one of Rollin's best, this film borrows heavily from Romero's *Night Of The Living Dead* (1968) and Grau's *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* (1974) while adding a new twist to the mayhem. A young girl traveling to South France to join her lover is assaulted during the train ride by what appears to be a decomposing corpse. She escapes to the countryside where hordes of flesh-eating zombies are terrorizing the villagers. The overpowering feeling of alienation and estrangement is suggestive of Hitchcock, and the flight of the girl may be a metaphor for mankind's fruitless flight from guilt or death. This young girl may run from zombies all she wishes, but she can never hide. For anyone just starting with the work of Jean Rollin, *Raisins Of Death* is an excellent place to begin.

The second Rollin film from Videosearch is *Fascination*, based on a 1925 French short story about vampirism in high society. In the new introduction to the film, Rollin tells us, "My friend the producer, came to me with some money and wanted to make a sex film. I asked him, 'Why don't we take that same money and make a real film?' And that's what we did." Through careful budgetary planning and deft use of available locations, Rollin was able to do a two-week shoot resulting in a superior appearing product. "It was a happy experience — the cast and crew were very sad when this production was concluded!"

Through the continued good works of Videosearch of Miami, another legendary artist of the cinema thus becomes accessible to American audiences. Rather than just a handful of titles, the entire body of Jean Rollin's output can now be enjoyed and studied; we're told that each of these films will be complete and fully uncut. As more titles become available, *Cult Movies* will present photos and reviews of each film released. Stay tuned!■



Fascination.

**For complete ordering information on the fantastic films of Jean Rollin, as well as hundreds of other exciting and hard-to-find titles, please see the ad for Videosearch of Miami on page 2 of this issue!**



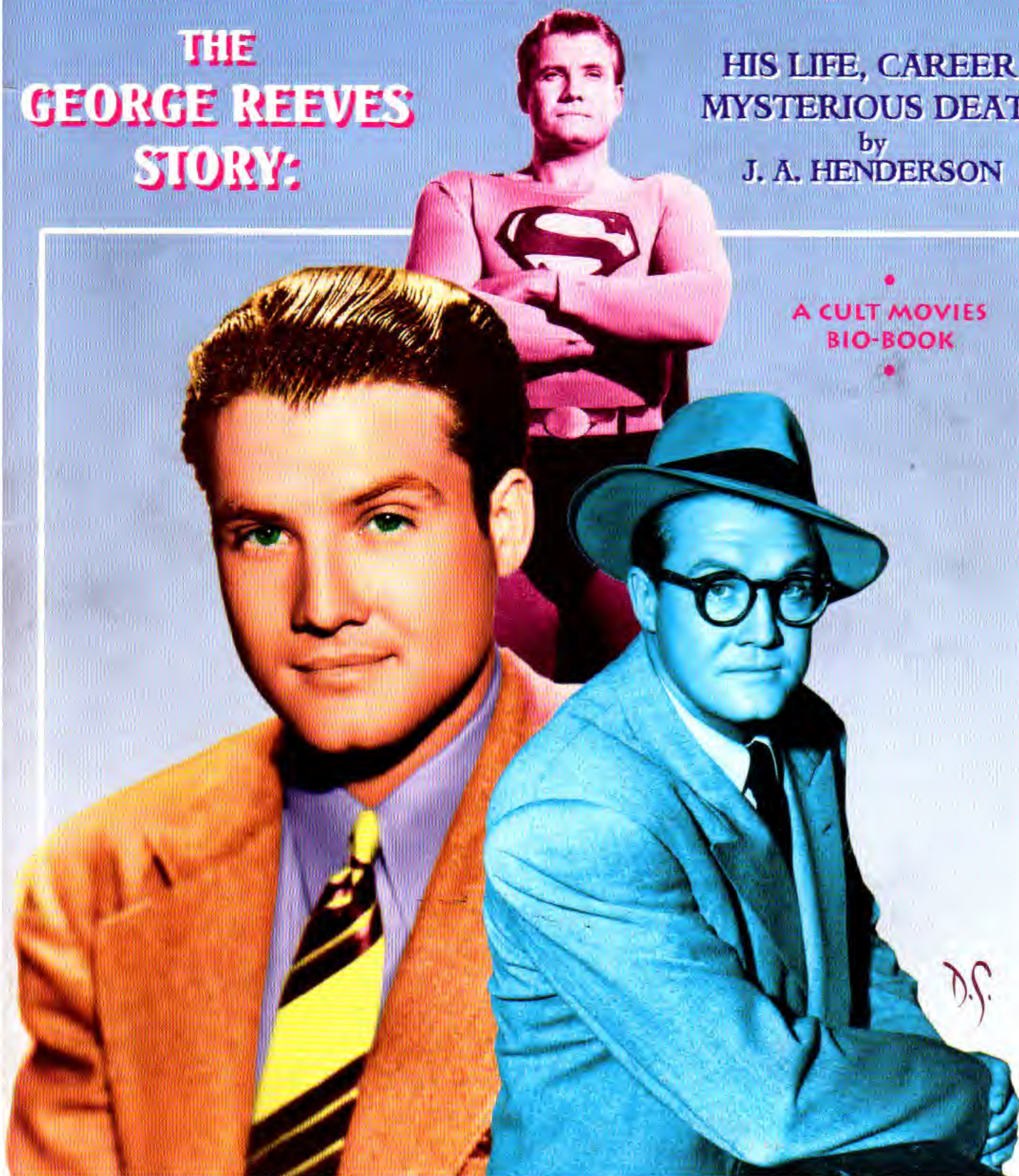
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D.S.





# GEORGE REEVES THE MAN, THE MYTH, THE MYSTERY

BY JAN ALAN HENDERSON

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## Dedication

George Keefer Brewer Bessolo Reeves  
Robert Shayne  
John Hamilton

## Foreword

## Statement of Intent

"The information contained in this piece was never intended to be presented in print. Instead, all the fundamental writing, ideas and structure were intended for two very different film projects. The first project was to be a Docu-Drama TV movie about the life and times of George Reeves, which would explore his life before and after *Superman*, and his untimely death. The second film project was to be a Public Broadcast documentary. It was to fully explore George Reeves' personal life, professional life, life on *Superman*, his mysterious death, and the myths that surround him to this day.

Previously, I have published two pieces on *The Adventures of Superman* and George Reeves, one appearing in *Filmfax* #11, and the other appearing in *American Cinematographer* magazine in October 1991. The *Filmfax* piece was a short bio, full of incorrect information on George Reeves. At the time of its writing, this project had not even been thought of. In-depth research over a multi-year period provided more accurate information.

The *American Cinematographer* piece was on the cinematography and special effects of *Superman*. Both these articles came to the attention of Jim Hambrick, *Superman* museum curator. I was contacted by Mr. Hambrick and asked to write screen treatments to pitch TV producers. I wrote three treatments for the proposed project, all of which did not sell.

After the *American Cinematographer* article appeared, I was contacted by documentary film maker Ed Guiragos, with the idea of producing a documentary series on the '50s and '60s TV icons, which included Patrick McGeehan, Raymond Burr, David Janssen, as well as George Reeves. I wrote several outlines for this proposed documentary, which was offered to several producers, including public television stations, cable TV outlets, and several large corporations. While some expressed interest, none could give definite answers or the promise of funding. The non-sale of both of these projects has resulted in this work.

The life of George Reeves is shrouded in as much mystery as his mysterious death. George Reeves simply did not talk about his personal life. It is my intention to chronicle the events of George Reeves' life — from his beginnings, to his tragic, untimely death. Through the words of his friends and co-workers, reports from newspaper and magazine articles, radio and TV media, it is my aim to try to shed more light on Reeves' life and times; to present a more accurate picture of George Reeves the man, not Superman, the myth. Some of this information is old, and some is new, but appears here all together for the first time.

Often, this material will raise questions for which there are no definite answers. Sometimes the information will contradict itself. Not everyone tells the same story. A good many of the participants in these events are dead, and even if they were here, most would decline to comment. There is no way to prove any of their statements, anyway. This in no way is an attempt to solve a mystery. It is an attempt to lay out the facts up to this time, and to allow the readers to draw their own conclusions.

For nearly two decades, various writers have announced imminent publications of Reeves biographies. None of these volumes have materialized. One such writer solicited for any information or photographic material pertaining to Reeves in various trade and general publications for over 15 years. A second author has solicited through the fanzine circuit for similar material. His efforts probably bore more fruit. In all probability, these two authors may have produced better researched and illustrated works than this one. It is my hope this volume will shake their literary trees, and that they will come forward and publish their material for us all to enjoy. I would have much preferred buying their works than having to write this piece. But life isn't fair, and it certainly wasn't fair to George Reeves the night of his death. His benevolence was rewarded with violence.

Bearing that in mind, maybe together we can all learn a little more about George Reeves, the man, the myth, the mystery.



# Part One: The Man

## Chapter One Confused Beginnings

George Reeves was not Superman. In fact, playing the part of Superman for six years may have contributed to George Reeves' death. What percentage it contributed cannot be known, because there are factors in George's early life that could have been major contributors to his untimely demise. While George was a strong man, there seems to be a vulnerability, an eagerness to please, that was a personality trait which shaped his life and his actions. His generosity was legendary. Maybe George was a little gullible? Maybe not.

It has been said that often we suffocate our heroes. An example of this would be the late Elvis Presley, who after years of touring, mediocre films and constant exposure to the public, retreated to his palatial home, Graceland, where he gorged himself on food and drugs until his body could no longer bear the strain. Reeves and Presley had one thing in common — they were prisoners of their own

fame. Neither one could go for a leisurely walk to pick up the morning newspaper without attracting crowds, which soon became mobs — crowds not unlike the ones drawn by the likes of Frank Sinatra, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and other pop and TV icons of the '40s, '50s and '60s.

The potential for Reeves' personal problems could have begun with his origins. His mother, Helen Lescher, of Galesburg, Illinois, discovered she was pregnant in 1913. Her beau at that time, Don C. Brewer, was the father of the child. Don and Helen were married to prevent George's illegitimacy, and moved to Woolstock, Iowa, where George was born January 5, 1914, and christened George Keefer Brewer. Helen's marriage to Don was short-lived, and soon she was back with a sister in Galesburg, Illinois, with baby George.

Helen's parents (George's grandparents), moved to Ashland, Kentucky, and Helen joined them. This is where George spent his formative years. After that, Helen can be



*George Reeves at the premiere of The Egyptian at Grauman's Chinese Theater, Sept. 1, 1954.*

traced to Whittier, California, where she stayed with other family members, perhaps another sister, before settling in the Los Angeles suburb of Pasadena. It is here Helen met and married one Frank Joseph Bessolo of California, who in 1927 adopted George and gave him his last name.

Some stories have suggested that Frank adopted George when he was a small child. In fact, George was 13 when he was adopted by Frank, so as a young adolescent, George might have known something of his origins. It is doubtful that Helen and Frank could have concealed the identity of George's true father if George was an older child. This raises the question as to whether George spent his childhood years in Ashland, Kentucky as George Keefer Brewer, or if he used his mother's maiden name. This is a mystery that

only Helen or other relatives could unravel. As of this writing, no relations of George, Helen, Frank Bessolo, or Don Brewer have come forward with any information. On George's Warner Brothers contract from the late 1930s, George states his given name as George Brewer, and professional name as Bessolo.

True to her former patterns, Helen divorced Frank Bessolo. Eight years later, Frank would commit suicide. Helen kept the suicide of his stepfather and George's birth date a secret for her own reasons. Or did she?

*The Adventures Continue* is a nonprofit fanzine dedicated to preserving the memory of George Reeves, first published in February 1988 by an Omaha, Nebraska anesthesiologist, Dr. Don Rhoden. Edited by Dr. Rhoden for two issues, *The Adventures Continue* is now under the able editorship of Pennsylvania educator Jim Nolt. For five years *The Adventures Continue* has provided fans with a forum to share informa-

STATE OF IOWA WRIGHT COUNTY

**CERTIFICATION OF BIRTH REGISTRATION**

This is to certify that according to records on file in this office, that

**George Keefer Brewer**  
(Full Name of Child at Birth)

Sex **Male** was born **January 5, 1914**  
(Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)

at **Woolstock** Wright County, Iowa  
(City)

Name of father **Don C. Brewer**

Maiden name of mother **Helen Lescher**

**Filed by local assessor**  
Date of filing **for the year 1914**  
(Month) (Day) (Year)

Book **2**, Page **11**

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the seal of the Clerk of District Court of Wright County, State of Iowa, has been affixed hereto this **16th** day of **November**, 19**83**

*Beverly Claude*  
County Registrar and Clerk of District Court

(SEAL) By Deputy Clerk

If this is a certificate of Delayed Registration, the evidence used to establish this record is indicated on the reverse side.

Warning: This certification is not valid if it has been altered in any way whatsoever, or if it does not bear the raised seal of the said clerk's office.

tion, reviews, and little-known tidbits about the life and times of George Reeves, both on and off the set of *The Adventures of Superman*.

In the third issue of *The Adventures Continue*, (Autumn 1989), reader/writer Rick Spector writes about his Quest for George Reeves. The Quest is a one hour multi-media presentation, depicting the effect of George Reeves as a performer, as Superman, on the baby boom generation. The Quest is also a documentation of Spector's trip to Woolstock, Iowa, in search of George's true birth records, his first home, and anyone who happened to know George.

Mr. Spector found one Mrs. Marie Claude, who owns the white frame house that George Reeves was born in. Mrs. Claude's father rented the home in which George was born to Helen and Don. She remembers two annoying traits of Helen's. First, she was extremely demanding, especially about the decor of the small bungalow. Second, she insisted on washing George's diapers in the kitchen sink — a habit which, no doubt, annoyed Mrs. Claude's father. The very sink was stored in the basement of George's former abode.

The multi-media event covers George's life, from his stage appearances at the Pasadena Playhouse, to his film debut in *Gone With The Wind*, to appearances in *Knute Rockne*, *Lydia*, *Torrid Zone*, also chronicling such "B" efforts as *Thunder In The Pines* and *Jungle Goddess* for Lippert Pictures, the first season of *Superman*, *The Blue Gardenia*, *Rancho Notorious* feature film roles, his disappointment at being cut severely from *From Here To Eternity*, the last season of *Superman*, impending work after *Superman*, the return of *Superman*, and the fatal night of June 16, 1959. Obviously, Mr. Spector has a great love of George Reeves. He and his friends will enjoy this slide and music presentation for years to come.

Maybe George wasn't Superman, but it's a well proven fact that his version of the Man of Steel is the first to be acknowledged as closest to the spirit of the comic. George's physical resemblance and sunny disposition were key elements in his Superman character, while Kirk Alyn's Superman resembles a cartoon. (No fault on Mr. Alyn's part. This was the interpretation that Columbia Pictures wanted.) George's Superman was more of a personality and a role



George's boyhood home. Photo by Rick Spector. Copyright 1995 TAC/Jim Nolt.

model. Maybe because George lacked a father figure in his own life, he understood the plight of certain members of his audience. But role models are people, and this was probably a double edged sword for George. Most forty-five year old men don't make their living running around in their underwear, or would understand why this would stimulate grade school children.

For the broken home problems George had to endure, George seemed to have been a level headed individual. Maybe things went haywire long before in adolescent George's new home of Pasadena, California? If so, there's not much evidence to prove it. All that documents this time in Reeves' life are old newspaper clippings that were printed almost two decades ago in the (out of print) book *Superman, Serial To Cereal* (Big Apple Series 1976), written by Gary Grossman.

## Chapter 2

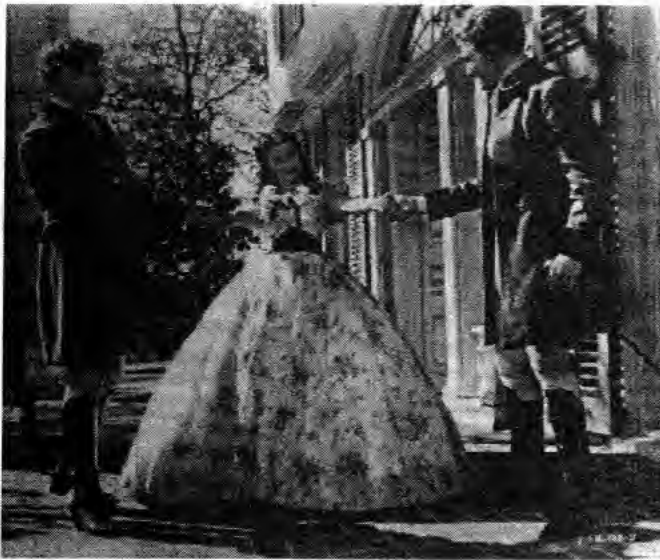
### Hiding Out In The Pasadena Sunshine

The length of Helen's marriage to Frank Bessolo has never been accurately documented. In fact, almost nothing is known of this union. There is a surprising lack of information on Reeves' early schooling: grammar school, Junior high school, High school. His life becomes more documentable when he reaches the end of high school, to college age. Reeves attended Pasadena Community College, where he showed a keen interest in boxing. Helen was against George going into professional boxing, college boxing, or just boxing, period. So much so, it was rumored George's mother had one of his opponents beat the living crap out of him, to discourage him from a career in the ring. Did Helen control all the men in her life? The answer depends upon whom you ask.

A report of Helen's possessiveness can be found in a *Chicago Sun-Times* interview from Tuesday, June 30, 1981, with actor/writer/Reeves biographer Jim Beaver. Beaver describes to TV and Radio critic Gary Deeb, Helen as a strangely possessive woman, with an unhealthy love for her son. According to the interviews, it was rumored that Helen believed in mystics, seances, and mediums, and was a regular participant in psychic circles. Beaver also depicts an eerie scene of the Bessolo living room, in which Helen kept an eternal flame burning near pictures of George, while George was alive and well. On a positive note, Beaver stated that through all his research, he hadn't found anyone who didn't like George. To date, Mr. Beaver has not published his authorized biography of George Reeves.

George's boyhood friend, actor Natividad Vacio, remembers things around the Bessolo household in a less extreme light. "I met George in high school — this was 1932. After that, we went for three years of Junior College at Pasadena City College. I knew the family very well. George's mother was a very sweet lady. Of course, she was motherly when it came to George wanting to be a fighter. She knew that George





*Gone With The Wind (1939).*

had to grow up, and she was concerned for his safety. All mothers react in this manner. She was no different.

"George and I were always making plans. We wanted to buy a burro and a horse, and travel from the Mexican border to Guatemala, to go prospecting. We planned these things, like fishing trips, or like buying a sampan and sailing the South China Sea; youthful fantasies. We talked about this a lot, but never did go.

"George was a man who loved everyone, including God. When George met a woman he cared about, he put her up on a pedestal. He loaned out more money than he earned, and he was seldom repaid. George didn't need a million bucks to get by. He didn't give a damn about money. His attitude was, 'How happy can I be with it?'



*George in the Air Force Special Forces during World War II.*

"During *Superman*, we would get together about once a month. I was in his band when he made personal appearances, and did some recording with him."

Natividad Vacio would later appear with George in the *Superman* episode "The Brainy Burro" (directed by Reeves), and in the Western classic *The Magnificent Seven*. He has appeared in countless films and television shows.

Actor Fred Crane remembered his friend George in much the same light, and was a guest at the Bessolo home in Pasadena during the filming of *Gone With The Wind*. "George and I immediately hit it off when we first met on the set of *Gone With The Wind*. We used to pal around in his Ford. When I stayed out there in Pasadena with George and his mother, I was not cognizant of their relationship. I was much too busy having fun. His mother had a delicate quality about her, like a Dresden doll. I think she collected dolls, as well. A couple of times I went to Manhattan Beach with George to visit his father. He owned a liquor store out there." (Many accounts list Frank Bessolo as a druggist.)

"I would not have noticed any possessiveness on Helen's



*George playing guitar on stage at the Pasadena Playhouse 8/12/47 in Girl of the Golden West.*

part, because my mother was a bit of a stage mother. She sent me out here (Los Angeles) to get into show business, after a neighbor of ours in Louisiana was brought out to Hollywood and signed by Cecil B. DeMille. In those days, our parents projected their unrealized hopes, dreams and goals on the children, so I had no way to evaluate the relationship between George and his mother. Never crossed my mind. Those were great days." One has to remember that in the '30s and '40s, child/parent relationships were not scrutinized and questioned as they are today.

"George was full of hell, full of fun. He enjoyed life, and that's the side of him I saw. Every now and then, George and I would sing together, and one day we were going out to the Arroyo Seco in Pasadena, where Busch Gardens was, to do an outside scene for *Gone With The Wind*. We did the barbecue scene, where you see the huge outside picnic. We went out in the limo with Olivia de Havilland. She had co-starred in movies with Errol Flynn, and all the swashbuckling stars of the day. She was a very beautiful lady, with an extreme degree of self control. George and I were just a



Above: George (left) and Johnny Weissmuller in *Jungle Jim* (1948).  
Below: *Special Agent* (1949).



George gets a helping hand in his only serial outing, the abysmal *Adventures Of Sir Galahad* (Columbia 1949). Reeves' portrayal of Sir Galahad is close in tenor to his *Superman*, but with all the production cheapness going wrong around him, it must have been hard for George not to bust up every time William Fawcett appears in his long white hair and beard, resplendent in *Merlin's* robes. If George was depressed about *Superman* at the end of his life, what he must have felt about this turkey couldn't have been much better.

couple of crazy guys. We were singing traditional Mexican folk songs. So we entertained Olivia de Havilland on the way down to the shoot."

When George was a player at the Pasadena Playhouse, his mother often telegraphed congratulations for each production he appeared in. One such telegram is reproduced in Gary Grossman's 1976 Popular Library book, *Superman, Serial To Cereal*. Dated December 21, 1937, it notes that George's performances are improving (in her opinion) with each play, and she was really expecting something from him on this late December evening. It's signed, "All my love, Helen." This was unusual in an age when parents were referred to as 'mother' or 'father,' and respect for one's elders was an iron rule for most Americans. Could George and his mother have had this type of progressive/liberated relationship in the '30s? One has to wonder.

### Chapter Three Lure of the Footlights

"Gilmore Brown founded the Pasadena Community Playhouse in 1918, shortly after World War I," recalls actor/director/theatrical historian Bart Williams. "By the 1920s it had become popular with the wealthy Pasadena patrons of the arts. Brown expanded the Playhouse to a school of the performing arts, while bringing in outside acts to round out the playbills. The patrons in Pasadena were proud to have their own stage, which meant they wouldn't have to make the trip to Los Angeles to see plays. The name was eventually shortened to Pasadena Playhouse. When George started there, it was still the Pasadena Community Playhouse."

The actual building was an exact duplicate of a theater in Tucson, Arizona. It was built before the Pasadena Play-





The Fighting 69th (1940).



Above & Below: Thunder In The Pines (1949).



house. Gilmore Brown's idea to use the same plans was a money saving move, as the playhouse was existing on donations. Both facilities are still operational, but Pasadena fell on hard times in the '70s and '80s. It was closed for a good ten or fifteen years. Pasadena is back up and run-



The Adventures of Sir Galahad.

ning, thanks to donations of the alumni. It was California's State Theatre. The Baby Boomers were the last group to study there. People like Sally Struthers were in that last group. They've just re-opened the school in association with the American School of Dramatic Arts.

"Pasadena Playhouse became famous as a dramatic arts college. It was *the* college of theater in the country. You had American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York, Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, and Pasadena Playhouse in California. The other local universities didn't teach radio, camera technique, lighting, and all the other skills required for a show business career. It was like the school in the movie *Fame*.

"The children of the privileged Pasadenians would be given preferential treatment at the school, but one had to apply and audition like any other school. In the beginning, tuition was quite pricey, but in the leaner years, almost anyone could get in, if they had a little money. It got a bit shabby in the later years.

"George appeared in *High Tor*, *Heartbreak House*, *The Boy David* and *Rose Of The Rancho* for Gilmore.

"Gilmore was gay! He had a circle of young gentlemen, some gay and some not, that he used to surround himself with. George was one of these young men that were called 'Gilmore Brown's Boys.' This could be the origin of the rumor that George was gay or bisexual. George was Brown's secretary for some time, so it's not surprising that the catty talk began. Gilmore would sort out these young men, and have his favorites. But teachers in any school do that. This is where jealousy came into play. The girls were jealous of Gilmore Brown's Boys too. He would have them over for dinner, things like that. The late Henry Brandon, who attended the school around the same time as George, described George as one of Gilmore Brown's Boys.

"Gilmore was not flamboyant. In fact, he was quite conservative. His style was tweed jackets and pipes. He was a very tasteful gentleman. It was his public relations work that kept the Playhouse together. He was the Dean of the school, and what he said went, no questions asked. He had to sell tickets, as well as teach, to keep a theater group like that solvent. Brown would greet all the patrons at the door.



George on the phone in *Good Humor Man* (1949). Dave Sharpe is at far right.



*Good Humor Man*.

Gilmore Brown started many great careers," Williams concludes.

George became fast friends with actor Anthony Caruso at the Playhouse. Caruso is remembered for his work in such films as *Asphalt Jungle* with Marilyn Monroe, *Desert Legion* with Alan Ladd, *Walk The Proud Land*, *Joe Dakota* with ace stunt man Jocko Mahoney (the only Western to not have one shot fired), and *Never Steal Anything Small* with James Cagney. Caruso has appeared in many television shows, such as *Bonanza*. In one unforgettable episode, he portrayed an outcast Indian named Squaw Charlie, who is accused of child molestation and murdered by a Virginia City vigilante mob. From his home in West Los

Angeles, Caruso reflected on his days with George in Pasadena.

"George and I used to do Shakespeare at the Playhouse. We hung out when we were doing shows. We didn't keep track of the shows we did together. We worked fast in those days. Pasadena Playhouse was a great training ground. Gilmore Brown held the whole thing together with his charm. He had the upper class ladies of Pasadena eating out of his hand. Those society matrons and their patronage kept the Playhouse alive. This was all due to Gilmore.

"From time to time, we would have parties, where George would play guitar and sing. Vic Mature was around, as was Robert Preston. The whole Gilmore Brown's Boys thing may have been a jealousy thing. Gilmore took several of these young men to Europe. George was his secretary. Bob Preston and Vic Mature weren't gay or bi, and neither was George. George never showed any signs of being homosexual. If there was any of this rough trade stuff going on, it was done to advance careers. If any of those straight guys participated in any of this, they probably figured, 'this is what I have to do to get to the next step, to get a bet-

ter part, and so forth."

"Later on, I did a *Superman* show with George, *Czar Of The Underworld*. He was a great friend."

Around this time, George began seeing Eleanor Needles, who was to become his wife in 1940. George was standing at the peak of the mountain career-wise, about to enter films in one of the classics of American Cinema.

## Chapter Four

### The Greatest Movie Ever Sold!

Margaret Mitchell's Civil War "Romance Novel" *Gone With The Wind* was first published by the MacMillan Company in June of 1936. It became an instant best seller, and three and a half years later, the motion picture version premiered in Hollywood and in Atlanta, Georgia. With a cost of four and a half million dollars, *Gone With The Wind* has made countless millions, and secured a place in the history of



Fess Parker (left), Iron Eyes Cody (with horns) George and Sebastian Cabot in *Westward Ho The Wagons* (1956.) Copyright the Walt Disney Corporation.





Westward Ho The Wagons. Copyright The Walt Disney Corporation.

epic cinema.

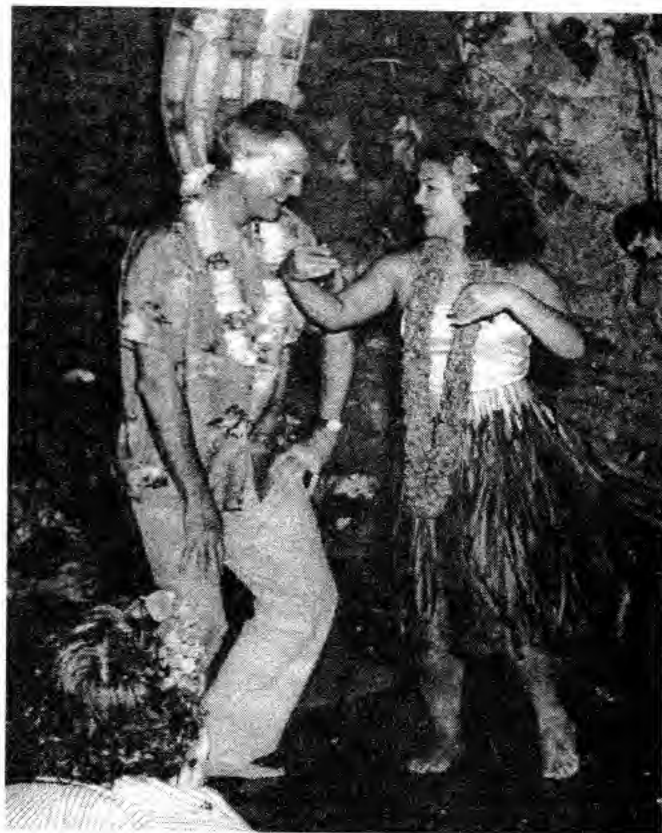
Filmed entirely on the Pathe lot (with some second unit photography done in the southern United States), *Gone With The Wind* began production with George Cukor at the helm as director. George Turner, former editor of *American Cinematographer* magazine, and author of such classic film books as *Forgotten Horrors* (with Michael Price), *The Making Of King Kong* (with Dr. Orville Goldner), *The A.S.C. Treasury Of Visual Effects* (with Linwood G. Dunn, A.S.C.), and *The Cinema Of Adventure, Romance And Terror*, visited the *Gone With The Wind* set while living in Hollywood during the late '30s.

"The Pathe back lot was called 40 Acres in those days," recalls Turner. "There was a creek that ran through the property, and all of the exteriors for the city of Atlanta were standing there. There were about a thousand dummies lying around in Civil War uniforms on the set. These were combined with fifteen hundred live extras for the scenes involving the wounded men. Matte artists added the wagons and other details for these shots.

"The Great Wall from *King Kong* was destroyed for the burning of Atlanta. If you look closely, you can spot the wall as the facade burns away, and drops off. The staging of the fire was done by Lee Zavitz on December 10, 1938. The wall was rigged with pipes, which contained rock gas and a distillate, run through atomizers. This enabled the crew to turn the atomizers on and off instantly. There were other controls that fed oil or water, so the fire could be ignited and extinguished on cue. Well over a thousand gallons of fuel was being consumed per minute, but with this intricate switching system, the waste was kept to a minimum. Spectators from the area crowded the local street to watch the blaze. One visitor inside the studio walls was actress Vivien Leigh. It has been reported that David O. Selznick decided on Leigh for the role of Scarlett O'Hara that December night.

"Although *Gone With The Wind* was a Civil War epic, it is interesting to note there is not one actual battle scene in the show."

It was reported that for *Gone With The Wind*, George Bessolo dropped his last name and became George Reeves.



George dances with a hula dancer during the making of *From Here To Eternity*.

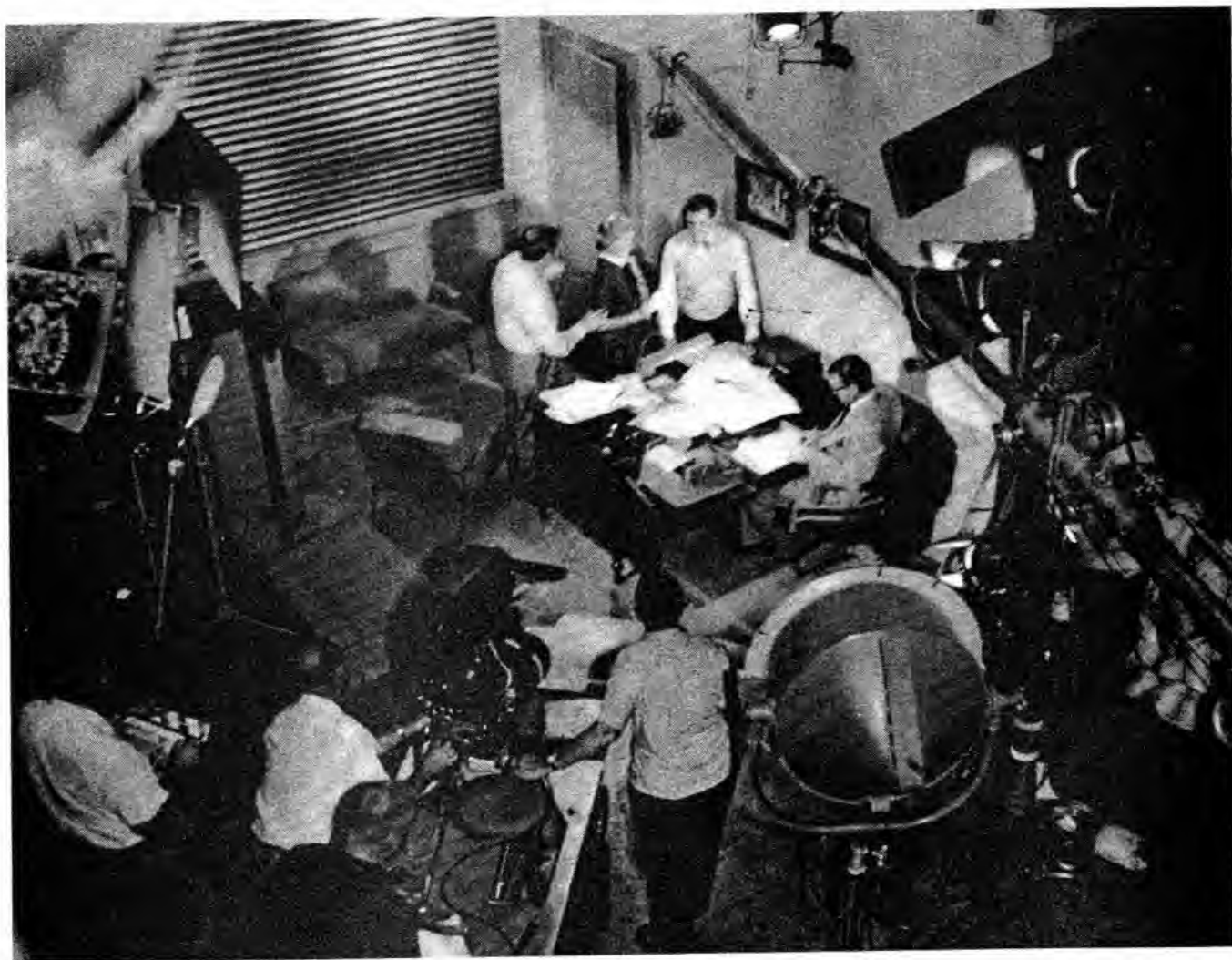
Actually, Jack Warner changed George's last name, feeling it lacked box office appeal. Warner Brothers had been developing Reeves as a B-unit player in a series of shorts. He played Buffalo Bill Cody in *Pony Express Days* (WB 1939), a bandit in the color short *Ride, Cowboy, Ride* (WB 1939) and was featured in *The Monroe Doctrine*.

For his full length feature debut, George couldn't have ended up in a bigger epic. This almost did not come to pass; for after the script was finalized in early January of 1939, there was concern about the budget and the running time. One idea was to cut the opening scene at Tara with the Tarleton Twins, but O. Selznick refused to go along with this glaring omission. He reasoned that the public, who were well familiar with Margaret Mitchell's classic, would demand the opening of the film to be the same as the book. The other consideration was the Tarleton boys' dialogue about the impending Civil War, important in establishing the basic plot.

Cukor began principal photography in late January of 1939, but his short tenure on *Gone With The Wind* was fraught with problems. His firing (because of personal problems with Clark Gable and creative differences with David O. Selznick) from *Gone With The Wind* must have been a great point of frustration for the director.

Reeves, Crane, and Leigh were in high gear when they began shooting the opening sequence. In such high gear, Cukor had his hands full trying to get the scene on film. It was also reported that the Technicolor rushes from that day's shoot were unsatisfactory. This was due in part to the fact that Reeves' and Crane's hair photographed way too red, and makeup and hair alterations were necessary.

Fred Crane remembers, "I was involved in *Gone With The Wind* before George was. His agent brought him in some time after I was in the company. David O. Selznick was an old campaigner. He knew exactly what he wanted, but at times he had difficulty communicating that to his technical people. The unusual thing was, I wasn't looking for a



*On the set of The Adventures of Superman.*

job. I had never been in a movie studio, nor had I read Margaret Mitchell's book. But I had a cousin, Leatrice Joy Gilbert, who was under contract to C. B. DeMille and cut quite a swath — married to John Gilbert. She wanted to do the part of Sue Ellen, that Evelyn Keyes eventually did. They took me out to the lot and gave me the full tour of the studio. Well, I finally ended up in Charlie Richards' office, who was then the casting director. He saw me, and heard me speak. I had just come from Louisiana, and he heard the southern accent, and said, "Have you ever done any acting?" I said, "Sure, I've acted on the boards at Loyola University, and Jerusalem Temple, and in New Orleans. So he gave me some sides to read, and I honestly didn't know who the hell he was, and I was not looking for a job, so I wasn't nervous. I read for him, and he called Cukor, and Cukor dragged me up to see Selznick, and Selznick was negotiating with Vivien Leigh, whom he had just met at the burning of Atlanta. So I read with her, and Selznick smiled. Before I got out of there, I had a contract for 13 weeks, for more money than I thought existed in the world — 50 dollars a week.

"Now, it was when I was getting my hair dyed that I met George. George and I struck it off right away. It was just something — we liked one another. The thing you have to remember is, the success of this didn't mean anything to me, because it was an unknown commodity. We didn't know that this movie would become the classic it has. *Gone With The Wind* is a hallmark of cinematic art. We had no idea of its significance. I couldn't have cared less — I was just hav-

ing fun.

"George had been working with Gilmore Brown over at the Pasadena Playhouse, so he was well experienced on the boards, as well. George and I worked together with a guy that I knew from Pascagoula, Mississippi — Will Price was his name. Will Price was Maureen O'Hara's first husband. He was subordinate to a woman named Susan Myrick (Myrick was the Southern dialect coach on the show), who was the Emily Post of the deep South, and a friend of Margaret Mitchell's. Will and George and I worked out the scenes and the tempo. We did the tests, which Selznick liked, and George and I found out later we were both slated for this thing. I tested just before James Craig, who at one point was being considered for Rhett Butler. It was a pretty well known fact, though, that Clark Gable was going to play Rhett. I had no nerves at all on the thing — I did my sides from off the top of my head. David O. Selznick referred to us as 'the Tarleton boys' rather than 'the twins' at the beginning.

"George and I used to go to Don The Beachcombers on McCadden Place in Hollywood. We used to go in there and drink a couple of 'Puka-Puka Punches,' or a 'Missionary's Downfall,' and eat some of that rumaki and hot shrimp. The next day we were so stoned, we couldn't get up and go to the studio — not that there was anything urgent or pressing there. They were probably just going to measure us for wardrobe. We had a good time. We'd bum around together and go over to Rand Brooks' place. Rand played Charlie Hamilton in the show.





Behind the scenes on "Superman Week," 1954.

"George was my best man when I first got married. George, at the time, was going with Eleanor Needles. Eleanor was a nice girl — she was a sweetheart. Lots of fun!"

On September 22, 1940, George married his girl friend of two years. An article appearing the next morning in the *Los Angeles Times* described the ceremony held Saturday night at the Church of Our Savior in San Marino. The bride was given away by her uncle, John Stevens of Beverly Hills. It stated that the couple met at the Pasadena Playhouse, and would reside in Pasadena. Actor John Wilcox served as Reeves' best man. The newlyweds were shown in a photograph, smiling at each other as they were leaving the church. Reeves' and Needles' union would last nine years. No reason has been given for their divorce. Eleanor has written a book about her life with George, which is unpublished. It is a book that avoids the hard questions, and gives no answers, according to those who have read it.

## Chapter Five

### Journeyman Actor Reeves

George's film career could have been his biggest elation or greatest pain. With *Gone With The Wind*, a new wife, and a contract at Warner Brothers, life must have been bright. But an actor's life is filled with insecurities. Things which ordinary people do not deal with are the actor's everyday environment. Now George had to deal with another actor's temperament. He and Eleanor were in the same profession. In an open letter to the readers of *The Adventure Continues*, author/actor Jim Beaver notes that Eleanor worked on stage as Shelly Spencer, Ellanora Burners, and maintains that her Christian name is spelled Ellanora. In the *Los Angeles Times* wedding announcement, her first name was spelled Eleanor.

There is no job security for an actor. Life is most often spent on the road. The hours and food are generally substandard for the struggling actor. Pay for live theater was usually not enough to sustain a character player. Personal lives often suffered.

After *Gone With The Wind*, George returned to work at Warner Brothers with three short films under his belt in 1939, and four features that same year. (*On Dress Parade* with the Dead End Kids, *Espionage Agent*, *Four Wives*, and *Smashing The Money Ring* (featuring Ronald Reagan).)

1940 saw Reeves co-starring with future *Superman* player John Hamilton (Perry White) and *Superman* villain Ben Weldon, in Warner's *Tear Gas Squad*. His next two assignments were opposite James Cagney in *Torrid Zone* and *The Fighting 69th*, building a solid foundation as a character actor. George serenaded the Ritz Brothers in Universal's 1940 production of *Argentine Nights*, and appeared in such films as *Calling All Husbands*, *Till We Meet Again*, *Gambling On The High Seas*, *Father Is A Prince*, *Ladies Must Live*, *Virginia City*, *Always A Bride*, *Knute Rockne* — *All American*, *Calling Philo Vance*, and *The Man Who Talked Too Much*.

In 1941, Reeves was re-teamed with James Cagney in *Strawberry Blonde*, and had a meaty role in the box-office bomb *Lydia*. George moved over to 20th Century Fox for the Charlie Chan thriller



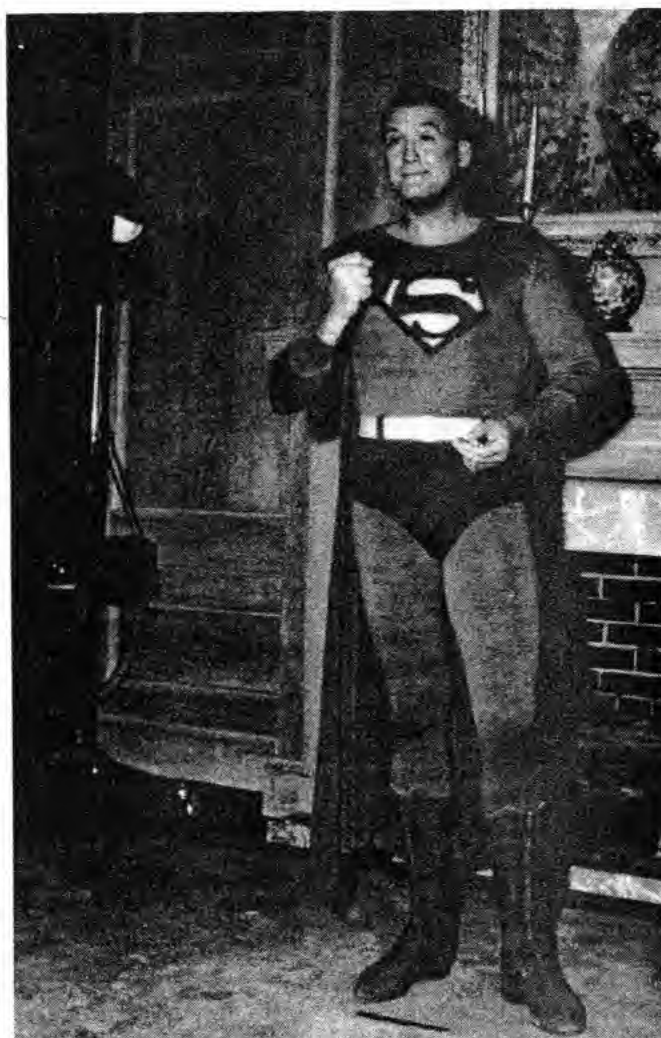
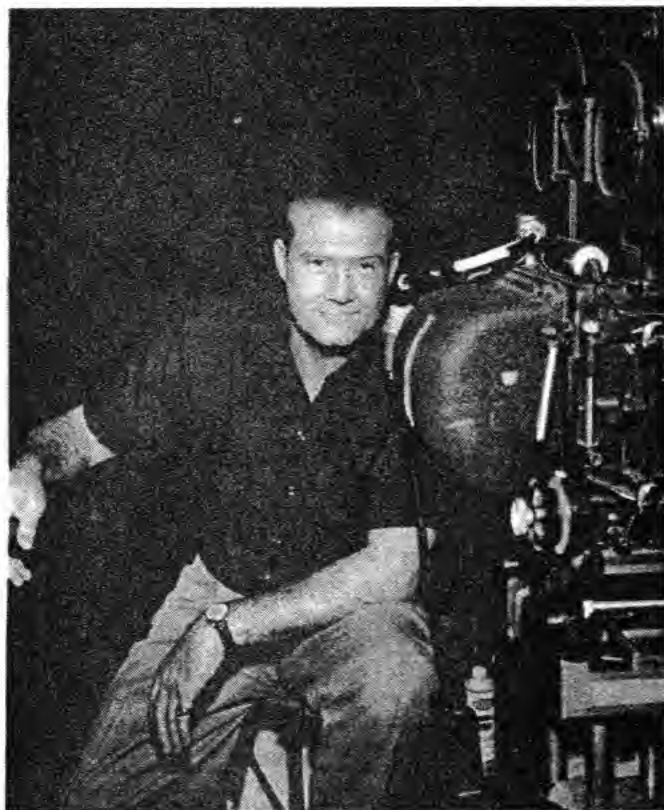


(left to right) George, Gig Young and Toni Mannix with a tribe of children, early July 1956.

**Dead Men Tell.** Reeves menaces the cast on an old spooky pirate ship, complete with peg-leg ship's captain and parrot. Unfortunately, George gets bumped off early in the show, and Sidney Toler and company carry on the mystery without him as a suspect. Roles in the remake of the silent classic *Blood And Sand* starring Tyrone Power, the excellent spy programer *Man At Large*, and *Blue, White And Perfect*, followed.

Reeves rode the B-Western range in Hopalong Cassidy's horse operas, as in *Hoppy Serves A Writ*, *The Leather Burners*, *Bar 20*, and *Colt Comrades* (all made in 1942).

In *Hoppy Serves A Writ*, Victor Jory and George play the Bandit Brothers Jordan (George as Steve, Jory as Tom). They begin by robbing the local stagecoach, which just happens to be driven by Andy Clyde (as sidekick California Carlson). This routine outing also features Republic heavy Roy Barcroft. Andy Clyde's physical comedy permeates most of this flick. Some of his gags hold up, but most fall flat. Sheriff Hoppy disguises himself as a meat buyer to track bandits Reeves and Jory, and after the usual Western adventures, Hoppy serves Reeves and Jory their writ, in the



old swimming hole.

George fares better in *Bar 20*. In this one George plays Len Bradford, Hoppy's second sidekick (along with the irrepressible Clyde). George has more sides in this film, and more screen time. Victor Jory essays another tumbleweed swindler.

*Leather Burners* features even less of Reeves. He appears at the beginning as the love interest lawyer. The most interesting thing this Western has going for it is an abundant use of Bronson Caves and Bronson Canyon. At times, this film attempts to blend the horror genre with the western genre, but falls short in its development of the horror aspects of the plot.

*The Last Will And Testament Of Tom Smith* is a World War II propaganda short, that gives Reeves his first starring role. He plays Tom Ellison Smith, an American flyer imprisoned in a Japanese prison for an offense against the gods. Top billed over Lionel Barrymore and Walter Brennan, Reeves gives an arresting performance as the soon-to-be-executed Smith. Barrymore and Brennan deliver patriotic messages intercut with Reeves' monologue. At one point as he faces the firing squad, he has a running dialogue with his grandfather (Lionel Barrymore). Grandfather Smith tells Reeves to relax, and that he will be spared the pain of death if he believes in their all-American cause. His defiance is reminiscent of his characterization of Superman. (An ironic footnote is that after Reeves is shot down by the firing squad, holding an American dime clenched tight in his fist, a Japanese soldier walks over to the slain Reeves and produces a pistol, and shoots Reeves in the right side of the head — the same side of his head that the shot that took his life was administered 17 years later.)





A flying shot from "Around The World," 1953.

This title is mis-listed in *Superman Serial To Cereal as The Last Will And Testament*. This film is referred to as one of the Hopalong Cassidy series. It is not.

For George, 1943 could have been the breakthrough year. He was featured in three films that year, *Buckskin Frontier*, *Border Patrol*, and *So Proudly We Hail*. The latter is a World War II tearjerker. Cast with Claudette Colbert and Veronica Lake, Reeves excelled in this war epic. He was most certainly on the threshold of stardom, when he was drafted. He and his wife Eleanor had no children, so Reeves entered the Air Force Special Forces.

An article in the fanzine *The Adventures Continue* (Issue No. 2, Autumn 1988) may help to shed some light on traumas in Reeves' life other than the postponement of his now-promising career. Former editor, author and founder Dr. Don Rhoden writes that sources for his article "And Who Disguised As" (the *Cincinnati Post* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*) indicated that Reeves found out the truth about his parental origins while serving in the military. The facts included the identity of his real father, the facts about his stepfather's suicide, and his altered birthday. Reeves was reportedly livid, and didn't speak to his mother for years (through the '40s). Another account claims that Reeves found out about Helen's deception shortly before his death, in 1959.

Reeves was stationed in New York City for part of his army stint. He played Lieutenant Thompson in *Winged Victory*. He returned to the West Coast briefly to film this Moss Hart play. Reeves also made training films for the military. One such film has surfaced over the years. This V.D. training film is entitled *D.E.F. 733*. It featured Reeves and an audience of GI's watching a movie graphically depicting the results of sexually transmitted diseases. The film is a total black and white gross-out!

Between *Winged Victory* and training films, Reeves was

still practicing his craft for Uncle Sam. It is doubtful Reeves saw combat action during the war or anything close to it.

It's anyone's guess as to what Reeves expected to find career-wise after his discharge from the Air Force's Special Theatrical Unit, but in spite of peace time promises to the returning soldiers, Reeves and others came home to pretty slim pickings. He worked for a time in radio in New York, after the war.

In 1947, Reeves had a bit part in *Variety Girl*, and made a short subject called *Champagne For Two*. Things began to look up in 1948. Reeves won a co-starring role with his old shipmate from *So Proudly We Hail*, Veronica Lake, in *Sainted Sisters* at Paramount. He was a villain with co-star Paul Valentine in the western *Special Agent*. But that same year, Reeves had to suffer through two low budget jungles. One was "Jungle Sam Katzman's" first Jungle Jim picture, with an aging Johnny Weissmuller whose loin cloth no longer fit; the other was hilarious *Jungle Goddess* (Lippert 1948), with Wanda McKay and Ralph Byrd. Reeves also endured a trek through a back lot forest in *Thunder In The Pines* (Lippert 1948), released in glowing sepiatone. The sepiatone gimmick didn't save the picture. *Jungle Goddess* shows occasionally on late night television, or the cable atrocity *Mystery Science Theater*, but *Thunder In The Pines* is seldom seen.

No matter how bad these features were, they could not have prepared George for his only serial outing, the abysmal *Adventures Of Sir Galahad* (Columbia 1949). This Sam Katzman produced chapter play is one of the worst serials to be offered to the matinee crowd. From Katzman's cardboard Camelot to the western sets disguised to look like merry olde England, this doesn't deliver much action or adventure.

Galahad puts up with walking suits of armor, drugged wine, the cardboard Excalibur stolen, enchanted forest (Iverson Ranch), and the Black Knight (whose voice is that of voice-over master Paul Frees).

Reeves' portrayal of Sir Galahad is close in tenor to his



Superman And The Mole Men.

Superman, but with all Katzman's production cheapness going wrong around him, it must have been hard for George not to bust up every time William Fawcett appears in his long white hair and beard, resplendent in Merlin's robes. This hokum was designed to fool five year olds. (It didn't!) If George was depressed about *Superman* at the end of his life, what he must have felt about this turkey couldn't have been much better.

George was also featured in *The Great Lover*, *The Mutineers*, and *Samson And Delilah*. In *Samson And Delilah*, he delivers a riveting performance as the wounded Philistine.

George and Eleanor divorced in 1949. Rebuilding his life and career after the war was a little more difficult than advertised, but George toughed it out. In 1950, George had one film role, with his co-star from *Strawberry Blonde*, Jack Carson.

*The Good Humor Man* is a delightful Columbia Pictures comedy romp. Jack Carson, as the kids' favorite ice cream man, hands out, of all things, Captain Marvel comics to the kids on his route, and tangles with gangster Reeves (who takes a double shot of abuse from Carson's kiddie friends).

Reeves had roles in two Fritz Lang features, *Rancho Notorious* (1952), and *The Blue Gardenia* (1953). But it was the humiliating experience of *From Here To Eternity* that virtually halted Reeves' film career. The role of Sergeant Stark was to have been a good sized part, but at press screenings the press screamed, "Superman!" as the television show had debuted not too long before the screenings. Reeves' part was cut, and another chance

at stardom for George as a serious actor went up in smoke. For 13 years, George had worked as a screen player, care-

fully building a respectable career, only to have the war and *Superman* thwart his efforts. He must have been damn frustrated.

George didn't make another film (other than the U.S. Treasury film *Stamp Day For Superman*) for three years. When he did, it was a routine kiddie programmer from Disney called *Westward Ho, The Wagons*, starring Disney's T.V. "Davey Crockett" Fess Parker. Reeves is the captain of the wagons that lead Fess, co-star Kathleen Crowley, and a horde of Disney kids across the plains just north of Los Angeles. For the first time on film, we see Reeves' true hair color (grey). He also wears a Van Dyke beard that appears to be his own. The Disney makeup department did little to hide the bags under his eyes, or his midriff.

He has 20 or 30 sides throughout the show, and is doubled in the long shots involving the wagons. William Beaudine's direction can't save a script that is backwards from the start. The major battle is in the first third of the picture, and the limp ending isn't helped by strong character portrayals by Sebastian Cabot and Iron Eyes Cody. The Cinemascope effects really steal the show on this picture. No



A springboard take-off from the color seasons.







A trio of photos from *Superman And The Mole Men*.



matter how inane the plot becomes, this film is darn pretty to look at. There are ten superlative matte paintings in the first reel. Hopefully this film will be released in a letter-boxed format sometime in the future, for it is a more than interesting curio in the film career of George Reeves.

It's no wonder Reeves wanted to direct in his later years. He had paid his dues as a journeyman actor, reached the top of the mountain, and looked over the edge; only to be yanked back to toil at his craft again and again in low budget productions. To have two chances at movie stardom, only to have them slip through his fingers, and *Superman* (something he had mixed feelings about) making him a television star, was undoubtedly a pain. Directing must have looked like a welcome way out of this dilemma. To be out of the rat race of acting, and to dispose of the Superman image must have been mighty attractive to George. If he was to flourish in Hollywood, George would have to do it as a director, not an actor.



## Part Two The Myth

### Chapter Six

#### Welcome To The Bottom Of The Barrel, Babe

"It seems everyone in Hollywood went on the interviews for *Superman*," recalls Phyllis Coates, television's first Lois Lane. Interviews were held at the old Selznick studios. There was a group of unknown actors and actresses, which I thought were too much competition. As I started to leave, Bob Maxwell came in and asked me where I was going. He asked if I was here for *Superman*, and I told him I was. He said, 'Come on, we're about to start the reading.' So I read for them, and I was called back a couple times, and subsequently read two more times. I think it was Maxwell who finally cast me. It could have been Barney Sarecky, the other producer.

"I didn't know what *Superman* was. I stopped reading the



*George relaxes in his back yard on a hot summer day.*

showed you the pain of it. He hid behind the humor.

"In spite of the joking aspect, there were difficult days on *Superman* for George. I was there when the wires broke and he fell. The visual was so funny to me when that happened. Here's Superman crashing to the stage floor, and I couldn't stop laughing. I thought George was going to kill me. He was very angry, and took it very seriously. Rightly so — he could have been killed. It happened a couple of other times, and they had to replace the special effects man. Really not much in the way of accidents happened on *Mole Men* and the other episodes. After these incidents (which were hushed up), George refused to fly on wires. The effects guys had to figure out another way to fly George. There was another incident with a break-away door. That's when special effects man Si Simonson was brought in. They kept a pretty close eye on George after that. They didn't want the star in the hospital, or any other bad publicity. The problem with the wire system was, it was piano wire run from a rope and a

funny papers when I was a little girl. Things like *Little Orphan Annie* never changed. I'll bet George didn't know what *Superman* was, either. I was familiar with *Dick Tracy* and those Sunday newspaper strips, but I never read comic books.

"I first met George when he was being fitted for the rubber muscles and the boots. He said, 'Come over to my trailer and we'll have a drink.' He mixed us a martini in his dressing room. We were toasting each other, and he said, 'Here's to the bottom of the barrel, Babel!' These low budget pictures were the bottom of the barrel to George. George had some good parts before the war; things looked pretty good for him. But after the war, he had to take these low budget things. He was pretty depressed about that. We were both broke. I was very grateful to have that job, not at all resentful. George complained about *Superman*, but he had such a great sense of humor, he'd turn the whole thing into a joke. He'd make fun of the whole damn picture. He never



*"Mr. Zero" (1956).*



*George in Philadelphia on a promotional tour for the show, Oct. 1958.*

gymnast's ring, to a harness George wore under the Superman suit. The wire would rub on the metal ring and break.

"It was back-breaking work that first season. Every day around 4 p.m., George would have open bar. To get to know George, you had to drink with him. Barney Sarecky rose hell with George for having his 4 o'clock nip, but George went on with it anyway. I know George's drinking got heavier over the years, as *Superman* continued. I could always tell when George had a couple. He would get bloated, and one eye would droop a little.

"George was a fine actor, classically trained, so this comic book stuff wasn't his cup of tea. You can understand his frustration, being reduced to running around in that suit.

"At the time, George was going with Toni Mannix, wife of Metro's general manager Eddie Mannix. Theirs was a sophisticated relationship. They were an open secret. Eddie knew about and approved of their romance. I think he had a mistress. Eddie and Toni were Catholics, as was George, so there was no question of divorce.

"Generally George and I would meet Toni after the day's shooting, across the street from the studio at a huge Mexi-





From "The Prince and the Pauper," 1956.  
Photo from the Superman Museum/Jim Hambrick.

can restaurant. We'd have margaritas and Mexican food. Toni was very careful in sizing me up when we first met. She wanted to be sure that I had no designs on George. So when she saw that we were just good working buddies, we became good friends. My baby daughter was in a cast at the time, and she was so sweet to her. She might have been ten or twenty years older than George, and he used to call her Mother. She had so much money and was terribly regal. Toni was so generous to me and my little girl. She included me in many of her social functions. I got on well with Toni.

"She once told me she was 'absolutely mad about the boy' (Toni's name for George). I could see that she could be a very jealous woman. We used to go to a health spa over on La Cienega and have steam baths and massages. We'd go to lunches, and have parties. George and Toni were real party people. Toni had the money to be extravagant. She was a generous lady. Her speech and mannerisms were slightly affected, and she had a great sense of humor. She was the same sort of drinker George was.

"The bottom line is that Toni paid for everything when we did those first shows. She owned George's house, his car, everything. It was all in her name.

"George also told me about some problems he had with his mother at that time. Differences of opinion. He indicated she caused him trouble from time to time. He mentioned that his mother told him that his birthday was in April. He said that he found out she lied to him, and his birthday was in January, like mine.

"After the first 26 shows, I left to do a show called *Here Comes Calvin* with Jack Carson and Allen Jenkins. I know George was depressed after that, because he called and asked me to come back. Whit Ellsworth really went to work on me to come back. He called and offered me the moon. He said, 'Name your price; George wants you back.' For me, there was no looking back."

Today, Phyllis Coates is a contemporary actress. After years of not acting, she has returned to her craft. In May of 1994, she appeared on *Lois And Clark: The New Adventures Of Superman*, as Lois Lane's mother. In the season finale, Lex Luthor buys and bankrupts *The Daily Planet*, and attempts to marry Lois while keeping Superman captive with kryptonite. She also appeared in an episode of *D*

*Quinn, Medicine Woman*, set for broadcast in 1995.

Jack Larson (who played Jimmy Olsen for the full run of the show) said he ran into the same sort of problems on the set in the later years of *Superman*. He recalled these incidents in 1988 for *Starlog* magazine (June 1988, No. 131). Larson told writer Steve Swires, "George liked to drink. The only trouble we had in all the years we worked together was caused by his drinking. George's girlfriend Toni Mannix would bring a shaker of martinis to him on the set. He would drink too much during the day, and couldn't perform well. As a result, we wouldn't break for lunch until 2:30 p.m. George would go sleep it off, and then come back and say, 'O.K. now, let's get it done.' He didn't want to be blamed for holding up production. They would send the day players home, and we would try to pick up the scenes, which meant I had to work very late.

"Whenever that happened, I would tell him, 'George, I don't care if you drink and walk off the set. Do it, and enjoy yourself. But don't come back. Otherwise, I have to work late. Just stay off the set.' The next day, he would think I was mad at him — which I was. To make up, he would say, 'Come on, Junior. You have to eat with us,' and he and Toni would take me out to dinner."

Was George Reeves an alcoholic? This is a question asked of Phyllis Coates on WNBC radio, by interviewer Alan Coombs in 1988. She responded by saying that she didn't think George was alcoholic, but that in those times it was martinis and parties, and that was an acceptable way of life then.

George's generation had grown up with prohibition, the depression, and were coming of age during World War II. The war united America in a way this country has not been united since, with the exception of natural disasters. Americans were bombarded with the horrors of war from daily papers, newsreels, and radios. The stress this must have caused on that generation cannot be calculated, and smoking and drinking were viewed as elegant. Most show people and theater people smoked and drank. George was no different from his co-workers. Whether his drinking was out of control cannot be known, but it must be considered a contributing factor in his death. This is not to imply that Reeves was a depressed, falling-down drunk. The depressions and drinking may have been a result of boredom with the role of Superman. The material on its own, would not have interested Reeves as an actor. It was tailor made for the Baby Boom generation. With the cartoons, the two Kirk Alyn serials that had been the entire filmed output for the Man of Steel, marginal popularity was achieved. Even the



George on a carefree afternoon in the mid-1950s.



Candid shot of Jack Larson taken by George on the set of "Lady In Black," 1953.

release of the feature *Superman And The Mole Men* did not compare to the popularity the TV show would have upon its release in early 1953, some sixteen months since filming of the first season wrapped. George's agent, like all the other cast members' agents, probably, told him, "Take this crap, no one will ever see it." No one could have known *The Adventures Of Superman* would take off like a rocket from Krypton, and that George Reeves would still be a household name some 36 years later.

The first typecasting pains were undoubtedly the press screenings of *From Here To Eternity*. To be cut from all but a few shots in the final release print must have devastated George. But according to those around him, he said very little.

While shooting the 1951 season, George met the Ellsworth family. Impressed by Pat Ellsworth's (Whitney and Jane Ellsworth's daughter) courage in dealing with recently being diagnosed with Myasthenia Gravis, George began his life-long charity work. He was a regular at Jane Ellsworth's charity functions. George seemed to renew himself through giving to others.

The character of Inspector Henderson was created especially for the TV show. Producer Robert Maxwell felt that Superman having a liaison at the Metropolis Police Department would be an element to keep the show's stories focused on the occurrences in Metropolis. Robert Shayne was cast for the part, and essayed it perfectly. A long time feature veteran, making his movie debut in 1934 for RKO Pictures in *Keep 'Em Rolling*, Shayne became a Warners contract player in 1943, debuting in a short entitled *Oklahoma Outlaws*. He has a role in the classic Bette Davis film *Mr. Skeffington*, is featured in *Rhapsody In Blue*, *Christmas In Connecticut*, and *San Antonio*. Sci-fi/horror buffs remember Shayne from such low budget productions as *Face Of Marble*, *The Neanderthal Man*, *Tobor The Great*, *The Indestructible Man*, *Spook Chasers* (starring the Bowery Boys), *The Giant Claw*, *How To Make A Monster*, *War Of The Satellites*, *Invaders From Mars*, and Republic serials *Trader Tom*



"The Big Freeze," 1955.

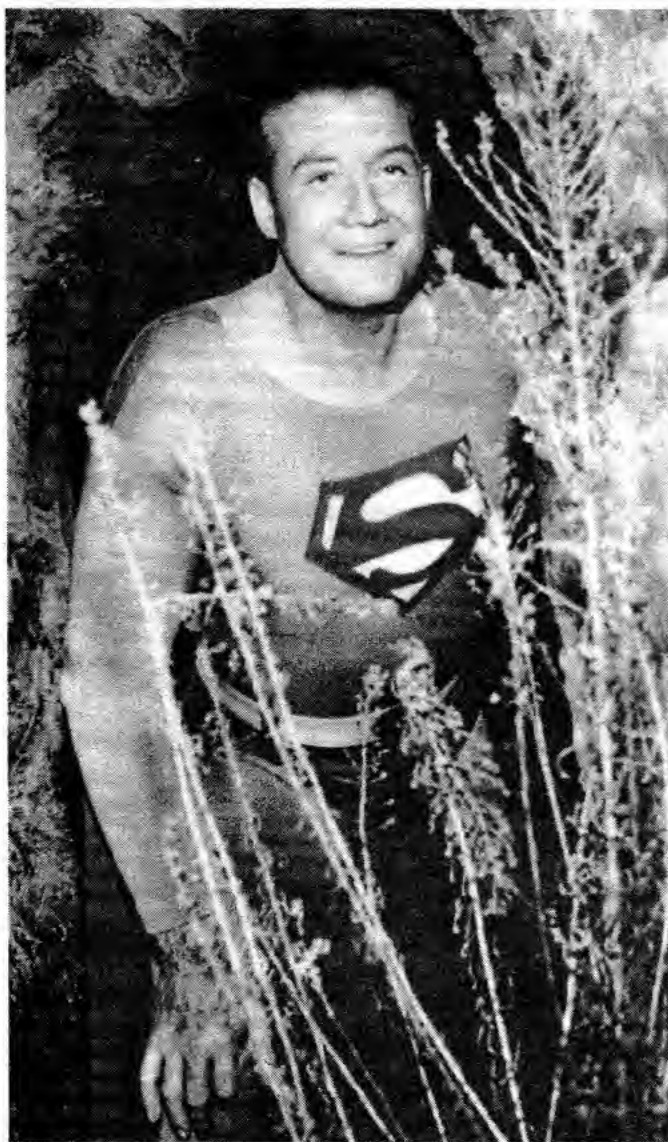
*Of The China Seas*, and *King Of The Carnival* (the last Republic serial). He appeared with George Reeves in the Fritz Lang feature *Blue Gardenia*. He was also featured in the Hitchcock classic *North By Northwest*.

Bob's widow, Elizabeth "Bette" Shayne, recently reminisced about her induction into the *Superman* family. "Bob was not the first person I met from the cast. Three girlfriends and I came out to Hollywood from Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1943. We went to the Brown Derby and met John Hamilton (who played Perry White in the series), who would hold court in the bar. John was the first actor I met when I came to California. He was such a delightful, kind, sweet man. He came over and sat with the four of us, and spent two or three hours talking with us. We found out his background — he didn't drive, he was divorced and had a young son who would come to visit him. So we got friendly with John, and we would pick him up and take him places. Many times we picked him up and brought him to our place for dinner — the four of us rented a house in Toluca Lake. I knew John long before I knew Bob. I met Bob in 1945.

"George Reeves, to me, was a very kind, very loving, nice man. Contrary to all the rumors, I never saw George drunk, never saw him take drugs. I heard later that he did, but I don't believe it. To me he was not a drunk — how could he be, when he worked so many hours and did so many stunts? At the parties, I never saw George drink too much. At his barbecues, he never drank too much, and neither did Toni. Of course, Mama Toni was always watching him. He was really a nice guy, very thoughtful of other people. Any time you were with George, he included everybody. He genuinely cared about other people and their feelings. You don't find much of that around today.

"He loved our kids, I'm sure he loved other kids, too. He seemed to, when he went on his personal appearances. I know sometimes he got a little bit frustrated with the tours, but when someone kicks you in the shins or pulls out a gun, the term frustration becomes rather mild! I know George loved our kids. An example is one time when the company was filming the episode *The Man Who Could Read*





*"Superman Silver Mine," 1957.*

*Minds.* The company was filming in the hills above Beverly Hills, and I had brought our son Bob, Jr. and daughter Stephanie out to the set. Now, our kids were generally well behaved on the set, except on this one occasion. Our son Bob, Jr., when he saw George and his dad drive up in a scene, shouted out 'There's my Daddy!' which spoiled the take. George picked Stephanie up over his head, and poor little Stephanie was too young to understand what was going on, and gave a look like 'I don't know about this!' Bob, Jr.'s nickname was Skippy. After George had done the trick shot, he motioned to Skippy to come with him. The kids had been playing all day in towels with makeshift S's on them. George took Bob, Jr. back with him to the wardrobe man, where George presented Bob, Jr. with a small cape with the official 'S' on it, made out of what appeared to be a portion of one of George's old flying capes. George wore several different capes, depending on what the shot required. In the flying sequences, he wore a much lighter cape than he did on the ground. Bob, Jr. was absolutely thrilled with the gift, and had it around the house for many years. All the kids in the neighborhood were envious. They viewed this small bit of *Superman* memorabilia as the golden fleece. It eventually was stolen.

"George and Bob got along famously. George had quite an intellectual side. They talked on a wide variety of subjects — politics, great books, Shakespeare, good music, all

kinds of things. Around the time of *Superman*, there was a very unpleasant incident involving Bob and the House Committee on Un-American Activities. George, Phyllis, and Robert Maxwell and the rest of the cast and crew rallied around Bob when he was called before the Committee. They went in and really fought for him — they testified as character witnesses. Bob was a fighter for human causes, and that's probably what got him into trouble. Bob wanted actors to get residuals — not an outlandish request, by today's standards. Screen Actors Guild at the time thought Bob worked for things that were subversive. Also, when Bob was at Warner Brothers, he wanted to take a writing class, because he was writing on the side. Warners sent him to someplace in Hollywood to a lady who was a good teacher. The House Committee called that subversive! One time in New York City, Bob helped actors bring in the ruling that if one actor was doing a specific role, they couldn't replace him, or allow his role to be bought. Another strike against Bob in the McCarthy era! It was really hell for him.

"Bob's friend from New York, Leon Ames, came out to California. He and his family were looking for a house. Bob and I were not married yet; we had been going together for about a year. Bob's first wife was back in Georgia getting a divorce, and Bob was in the Toluca Lake home all by himself. The girls and I lived about three blocks away in Toluca Lake. This was the house that Bob bought with his first wife, when he first came to Hollywood. When Leon was building his home, Bob invited him to live in the house. Leon brought his wife, two kids and a nanny, and Bob lived in one room of the house, basically just coming home from the studio to sleep. He and I went out to dinner almost every night. He gave Leon everything. It was about three or four months until their house was finished, and they could move in. And then, Leon just turned on him! That always hurt Bob. Leon proclaimed that Bob was a card-carrying Communist! That was just so far from the truth!

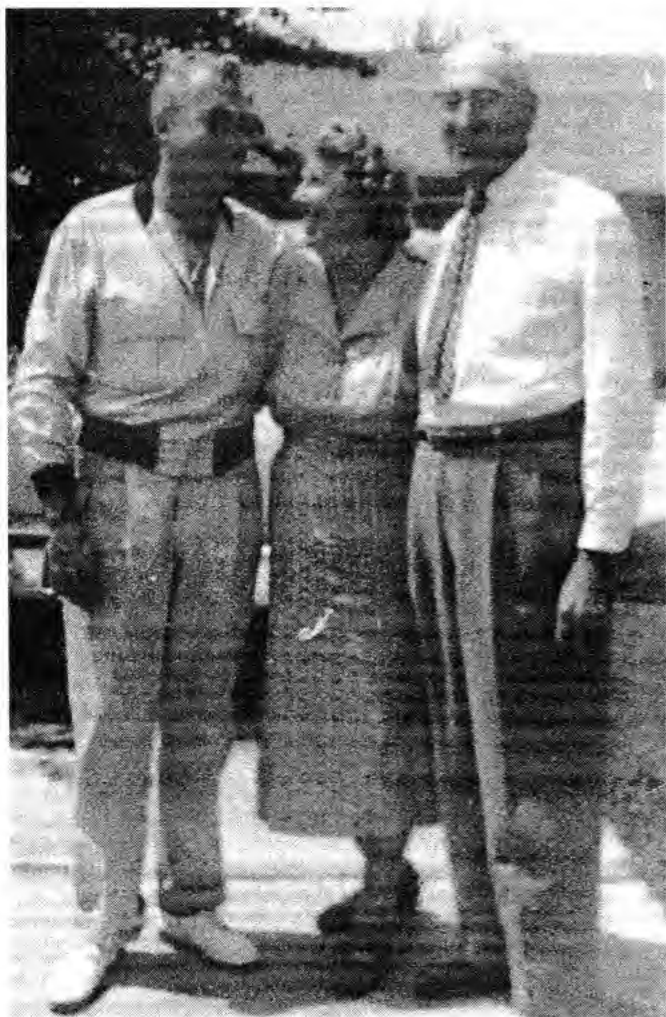
"All of this began very innocently. At the time, someone suggested that Bob go to a meeting with him. It was implied that this was some kind of Actors Rights group, and of course, this appealed to Bob, being the humanitarian that he was. So Bob went, and when he got there he discovered he was in a Communist cell meeting, so he got up and left, and that was it. He never signed anything, he never had a card, he never paid any dues. He had told Leon, who he considered an old pal, about this extraordinary evening, told him he had gotten up and left before anything really began. It was dishonesty, because there was nothing to it.

"This first incident was during that first season of *Superman*. All of the actors and crew were answering their usual early morning call, and George and Phyllis were walking



*"Flight To The North," 1954.*

*Photo from the Superman Museum/Jim Hambrick*



George (left) and two unidentified friends, mid-1950s.

in, as the FBI were taking Bob out in handcuffs. George said to the arresting officers, right then and there, that Bob was the most All-American guy in town. He said, 'He's so straight, this is unbelievable!' George rose hell with the arresting officers — he got so worked up, he was ready to hit them! Lee Sholem and Robert Maxwell gave the cops hell as well. The entire cast and crew went to bat for Bob, and that's something he never forgot.

"Kellogg's tried to railroad Bob off the show, in the second season, but Whitney Ellsworth did not tolerate a minute of it. They wouldn't let Bob do any of the Kellogg's commercials. They always had Perry, Clark and Jimmy, but Noel and Bob were excluded. Whitney gave them hell! Kellogg's response was, 'We really think you should not have Bob Shayne on your show, because of his Communist leanings.' He said, 'If Bob Shayne goes, I go. There's no way — This man stays. I'll get other sponsors!' They shut up in a hurry — there was no more talk about canning Bob.

"Later the government found out he *never* should have been called in, and apologized profusely. Senator Jackson, who was on that Committee, he said, 'Bob, I am sorry. This was a *terrible* mistake.' For about three years, he tried to get Bob off of the Black List at the studios, because they had him on a list. So Bob said, 'To hell with it! I have a college education, I'm going to get my real estate broker's license, I'm going to get my broker's license in insurance,' and he opened up a big insurance office called Robert Shayne & Associates. Some actors came, and went into business with Bob. He had the business for 25 years. Bob had something to fall back on. He had so many people working for him in real estate and insurance, he could always

take time out to do a few days on a picture.

"Whether George drank to excess or whatever, after 5 p.m. in his dressing room or home, that was George's business. When Bob was signing contracts with Whitney Ellsworth, I generally sat in the car, as these things only took a few minutes. George would come out to the car and give me a great big kiss, and I never smelled alcohol on his breath. If he drank to excess, he kept it hidden, and never showed any signs of it when I was around. He was such a gentleman in every way."

"Smoking and drinking were in vogue in the '30s, '40s and '50s" recalls theater historian Bart Williams. "Actors were especially susceptible, as their whole lives depended on their chic images. No one at the time realized that this behavior was destructive to their health. The way George Reeves and Toni Mannix conducted their everyday lives was no different from any citizens of Hollywood. It's only recently we've learned the dangers of all of these activities. How many lives could have been saved with the knowledge we have today? It's incalculable."

Makeup artist Harry Thomas should be no stranger to *Cult Movies* readers. Harry did makeup on the Ed Wood classics *Glen Or Glenda?*, *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, *Jail Bait*, and *Night Of The Ghouls*. He created horrific makeups for *She Demons*, *Frankenstein's Daughter*, *From Hell It Came*, and the original *Little Shop Of Horrors*. Harry Thomas was the makeup artist for the 1951 season of *Superman*, including the feature *Superman And The Mole Men*. In a recent phone conversation, Thomas gave this writer his personal reflections of George Reeves.

"I first met George in July of 1951. I had been signed on to do *Mole Men* and the other 24 episodes of *Superman* for National Comics and Flamingo Films. George was no different than any other actor. He had an actor's ego, and was concerned about how he would come off on film. When I began making him up, because we were so pressed for time in those days, I may have been a little rough. George let me know that his nose was a bit sensitive. He was an amateur fighter in his college days, and he had had his nose broken



Promotional photo from "The Stolen Elephant," 1956.





*George and his schnauzer Sam prepare for a sailing expedition.*

several times. I believe before we did the *Supermans* he had some sort of nose surgery, and his nose was still a bit tender. For the rest of the shoot, I used to use a sable brush on him. This worked fine. I also used to trim his hair, and put the vegetable rinse on it, as he was prematurely gray.

"When it came to doing makeup, George was a little more private than most actors I worked with. You can understand them wanting their space when they're memorizing their lines, but putting on makeup to most actors is like sitting around with a bunch of guys in the barber shop.

"The great thing that came out of all this is George would bring his guitar along. When we were waiting between takes in his dressing room, he would play guitar and sing, and I would sing along with him.

"My other responsibilities on that shoot were making fresh mole men skull caps at the end of every day's work, so we could apply the appliances at the beginning of the next day's work. My other recollection of that first season was having to age Clark Kent's parents in the first episode, *Superman On Earth*, which was shot toward the end of the entire shoot.

"To my mind, George was the only actor who had the look and the style of the *Superman* comic. When we worked together, he did express a little fear of typecasting, but in later years, after I left the show, I saw him occasionally. We'd run into one another about once a year.

"At some point in that first year of shooting, I met his mother at the studio, who was very sweet, and his girlfriend. Both ladies were extremely proud of him.

"As to whether I think George killed himself, that's a lot of hoey. George loved himself and loved life. I know this has all been said before, but he really did have a good attitude toward both. I bumped into him as I was driving up Benedict Canyon shortly before he died. I got out of my car, and we had one of our great encounters. He said to me,

"There's lots of stuff coming up, Harry! There's the *Supermans*, and some features, and I'm going to be directing!" The man was damn happy. In my opinion, there's no way that he killed himself. But maybe I didn't see the down side. I've heard and read all the stories, and somehow it just has never made sense.

"I was at home reading when I heard the news of his death. I have always had trouble sleeping, so most nights I read all night. I had the radio on and was listening to the news, when the flash came on! I was absolutely devastated! But what could I do? To this day I mourn the loss of my friend.

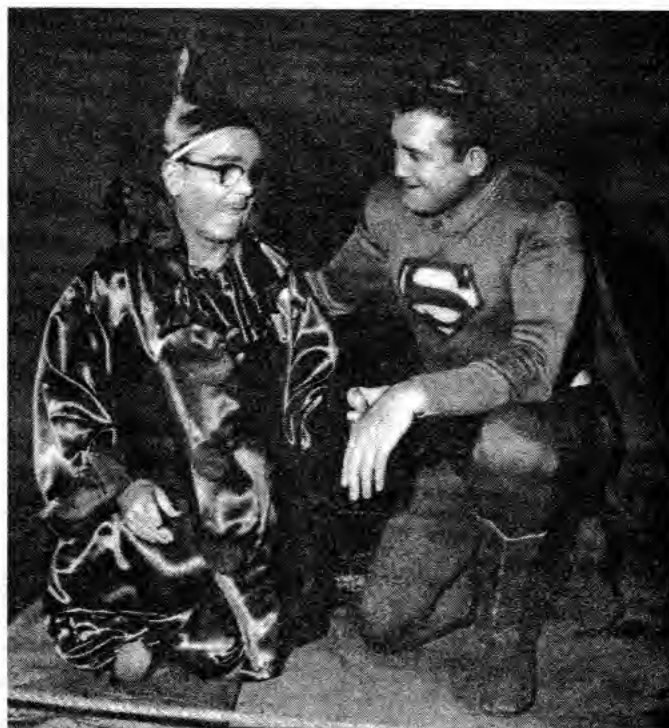
"He really was the best Superman, you know."

## Part Three The Mystery

### Chapter Seven A Shot In The Dark

When the 1957 season wrapped on November 27, 1957, after 104 episodes (52 in black and white, and 52 in color, plus a film for the U.S. Treasury Department, *Stamp Day For Superman*), the cast and crew thought they had put the Man From Krypton to bed once and for all. The company was accepting other assignments, and it looked like Superman had finally flown his last flight. Nothing could have pleased George more. George was looking forward to getting into other ventures, including directing. He masterfully directed the last three episodes of *The Adventures Of Superman*, with *The Perils Of Superman* being a stand-out episode. *The Perils Of Superman* resembles a serial chapter more than it does a complete half hour episode of *Superman*.

Not much is known about George's offscreen life in late 1957 and early 1958. From all accounts, things seemed to be business as usual for George, with *Superman* residual checks coming in on a regular basis. While the rest of the cast were given paltry sums, George most likely cut himself



*With Mickey Knox from "Topsey Turvey," 1955.*

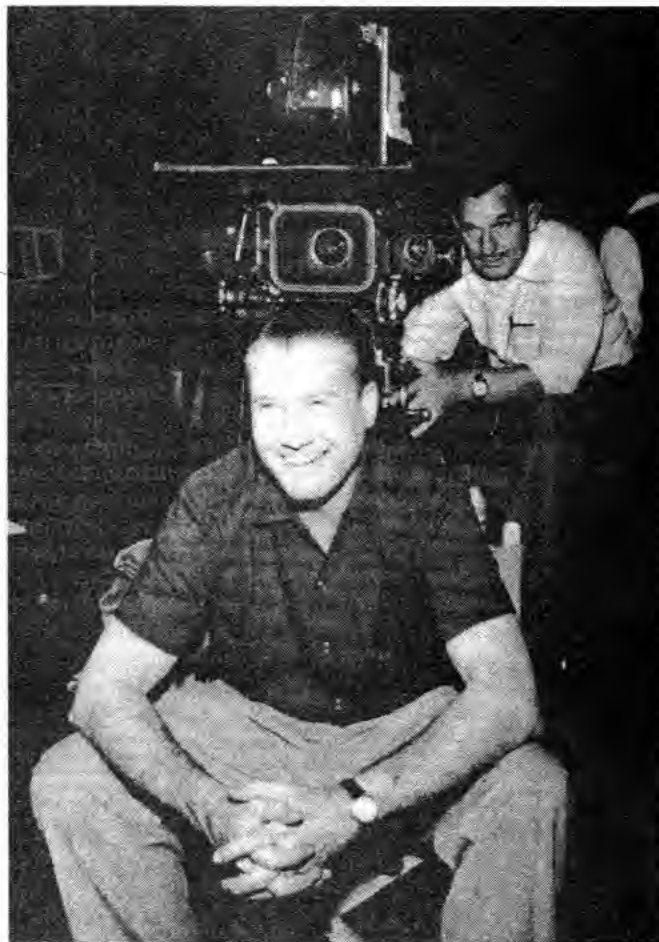
a much better deal, therefore his residual checks must have been larger. He had also done one personal appearance tour prior to the shooting of the 1957 season, and went out on a cross-country tour in October of 1958. He also made local appearances, and continued his nonstop charity work. From all reports, all seemed to be well between George and Toni Mannix, until George went to New York to do some publicity for the last season. This was sometime in the summer or fall of 1958.

A *New York Post* article from Sunday, June 29, 1958, entitled "Superman Looking For A Place To Land" (by writer Bob Thomas), describes actor George Reeves' transition from acting to directing. In the opening paragraph, Reeves laments, "It's like Hopalong Cassidy trying to get an acting job in white tie and tails." After 26 years of acting, and a screen career of 21 years, George Reeves was beginning to understand why he wasn't offered acting jobs — simply because he was Superman, according to writer Thomas. Thomas reported a positive picture of Reeves' well-frozen acting career, which according to the piece, drove Reeves behind the camera. Reeves is quoted as saying, "I took over as director on the last 13 *Superman* segments that we made last fall. (Reeves directed the last three episodes of the 1957 season.) I did it as sort of a chance, but I was surprised to find out how much I knew. I suppose you ought to absorb some knowledge after being in this business as long as I have. Now I am enthusiastic about doing more. I am forming a production company, and we plan to make a couple of science fiction pictures. The trick stuff should come easy. We've done everything imaginable in the *Superman* series."

George goes on in the interview to explain that he took *Superman* because he was hungry. The article also states that Reeves was receiving perpetual residuals, and was paid every time the series was played. Mr. Thomas also reports with well over 100 half hours already made, the *Supermans* scarcely need to be replenished; but that George has been making 13 each fall in color. The article also reports that George was busy writing, and was planning to produce. According to Reeves, if things ever get dull, he can always go out on a personal appearance tour. "I'm great when they want to open something to attract kids," he said. "This sum-



"Stamp Day For Superman," 1953.



George and cinematographer Joe Biroc, ASC.

mer, I may go to Japan. I'm big in Japan." Indeed, George was big in Japan, and it is said that he received correspondence from the Japanese emperor.

Phyllis Coates recalls, "George came around to see me with Toni, before he died. He gave me a script for one of these science fiction features that he was doing with his own production company. I think some large company like 20th Century Fox was putting up the money to do these pictures, and George's production company was handling the actual on-hand filming. He was with Toni at the time, and I told him, 'No, George, you keep the script, because I'm moving and it will just get lost in the move. When I get settled, call me and we'll get together and go over the script.' This must have been sometime in the summer of 1958. He said to me, 'I'm finally done with this acting bull, and I'm moving on to directing.' He was terribly enthused about the prospect of becoming a director and producer. He was more up than when I had seen him over at Ziv Studios the year before. I was doing *I Was A Teenage Frankenstein* with Whit Bissell, for producer Herman Cohen.

"At that time, George was doing the last season of *Superman*. When I arrived for an early morning call, George invited me over to his dressing room for a cup of coffee. George was having a slug of brandy in his coffee, and that was seven in the morning. I just couldn't get behind that. George was having his morning nip, and working on something that bored him. We kept in touch during the years of the series. I know that he was frustrated as an actor playing Superman. Branching off into being a director for George was just what the doctor ordered. He had a bright future ahead of him."

Sometime in the fall of 1958, George and Toni Mannix broke off. It was a violent break. This surprised all of his friends, including Bob and Bette Shayne.





George with production manager Ben Chapman.

Bette Shayne remembers attending a barbecue in the summer of 1958 at George and Toni's. "George enthused about buying a lot further up Benedict Canyon," remembers Bette. "He and Toni were going to build their dream home. Bob was equally enthusiastic for them and said 'Great!' and George told him they had already purchased the property. The party was slightly flawed by the fact that John Hamilton, who at that point couldn't have more than a few drinks without getting nutty and passing out, passed out. George and Bob had to pick John up, pile him in the car, and take him home to his apartment on Vine Street near Fountain, right across the street from the famous Hollywood Ranch Market. (The Ranch Market, a Hollywood landmark since the 1940s, was torn down in the early 1980s to make way for a mini-mall.) There they undressed him and put him to bed, which was a now well-familiar ritual with John when he drank. They came back, and we continued the barbecue. Poor John — he must have lived in that apartment across from the Ranch Market for years. Things didn't get much better for him. He had been a character actor, and remained one until his death in October, 1958." By that time, George had broken off with Toni and was seeing Lenore Lemmon. "Toni, right up to the very end," remembers Phyllis Coates, "was totally in love with George. I was living in Beverly Hills at the time, and she used to call me constantly and tell me, 'Please, go over and talk some sense into the boy! This is crazy! That tramp, that slut!' She would carry on about Lenore. She absolutely went into a rage after the break-up. I kept saying, 'Toni, he's a big boy.' She was always after me to do him the favor of talking him out of Lenore. She wanted to cut his throat, and kill him and all that, but she never would have. You can't kill something you love, something you're obsessed with."

George was doing a final round of *Supermans*, for the money, until he started directing features. He was to direct some of the *Supermans* as well.

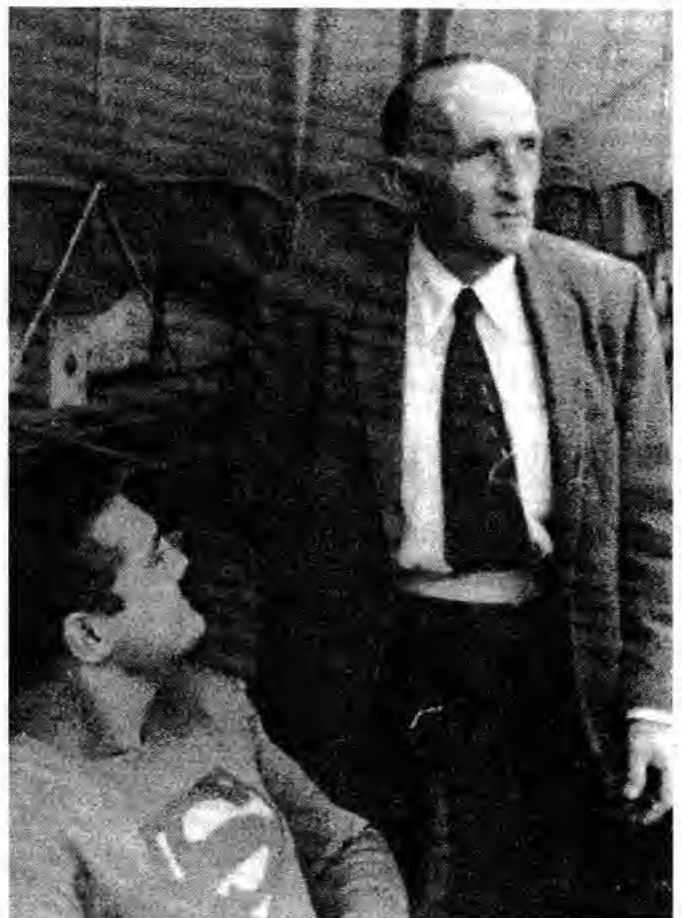
"When George broke up with Toni, he was finally in a financial position to afford the house. He was getting residuals, and paying a very low mortgage on the place, even though it was in Toni's name. Everything was in Toni's

name, because when they first started going together, George was flat broke. George called me one time, and invited me up to the house for dinner to meet Lenore. I was going through some personal problems at the time, and didn't go. Toni was calling me at the time, anyway, about George, and this put me in the middle. I just wanted to stay out of it.

"He had met Lenore, as I recall, in New York. Toni was trying to get everybody involved, to harass George about his relationship with Lenore. She wanted Lenore hassled. Toni was stirring the pot. She was desperate, and insanely jealous. She wanted to drive George and Lenore crazy, and deprive them of whatever peace they could have.

"Eddie knew what was going on. But he was so sick, he didn't give a damn. In 1956, Eddie Mannix retired from Metro because of failing health. I think it was his heart that was the problem. Eddie remained on Metro's board and kept an office there as an advisor. He visited the lot several times a week. Eddie was in a wheelchair and could barely speak at the time of George's death. They had to have an elevator put in their home for Eddie to get up and down from his bedroom, and to other parts of the house and to the car. Poor Eddie had to work at staying alive."

An interesting story contradicting Eddie's medical condition comes from James Spada's Peter Lawford biography *The Man Who Kept The Secrets*. Lawford's manager and agent were negotiating on Lawford's behalf for a role in the Frank Sinatra film *Never So Few*, with Benny Thau, head of talent at MGM. The story goes that when talks hit a snag, Thau pushed an intercom button, and into his office bounced Eddie Mannix, who took over the meeting by growling, "What's going on here?" at the startled manager and agent. This was three years after Eddie's semi-retirement. Eddie did retain an office at Metro, and was an advisor. Maybe Eddie forgot his wheelchair that day?



George with Henry the prop man on location.

Jack Larson noticed a change in George at John Hamilton's funeral, which he described in his *Starlog* interview. "George told me that he had split up with Toni. George had become involved with a cafe society woman from New York, Lenore Lemmon, whom he planned to marry. Lenore was an infamous party girl, and was rumored to have connections to organized crime. We talked after John's funeral, and he told me about Lenore. I asked him 'What is it, or are you crazy?' He said, 'Lenore makes me feel like a boy again.' George lived big, and I knew he didn't earn enough money to support himself. Much of his money had come from Toni. Toni loved George 'til the day she died."

In the now defunct *Los Angeles Herald*, an interesting tidbit about George appeared on January 22, 1959. Bearing the lead line "Someone Stole Superman's Dog," it reports that someone lifted Sam, George's faithful Schnauzer, at 1627 North Vine Street in Hollywood. George filed a complaint with the cops immediately. It was reported that poor Sam had lost an eye in a previous auto accident, and was under constant medical care. Reeves stated the dog was in need of medical attention, and he asked anyone with knowledge of the whereabouts of his pooch to contact him in care of Superman, Inc. at 7324 Santa Monica Boulevard.

A blurb in the April 9, 1959 Los Angeles newspapers reported that Superman had only turned out to be human. "The actor who delights viewers by soaring through space with the greatest of ease couldn't negotiate a turn in his sports car early yesterday, and wound up with a five inch gash on his forehead. What's more, when police were questioning him about the accident on Benedict Canyon Drive near Easton Drive, Superman fainted. Reeves, 45, was taken to Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, where he remained." Eleven days later, in *Newsweek Magazine*, George's accident was



"Human Bomb," first season.

reported with more levity. "Tooling down a terrestrial canyon near Hollywood, at the helm of a Jaguar, TV actor George Reeves, beloved to millions of kiddies as indestructible Superman, hit an oil slick and piled into a stone wall, suffering a mild concussion and a nasty gash on his forehead. Climbing out of his crashed earth vehicle, Superman fainted."

There was definitely a seventh season planned. Henry Gris, a United Press International reporter, published an interview in May, 1959, in which Reeves proclaimed his love for Lenore, and his intention to marry her, as well as revealing that a new season of *Superman* episodes (26 shows) were to be filmed in the fall of 1959. Gris also began negotiations for a personal appearance tour for George in Australia and other countries. In the interview, Reeves states that the reason Kellogg's and Superman, Inc. wished to film an additional 26 color episodes was because they felt the 35 millimeter inter negatives were substandard, and would not hold up in future telecasts, as color television was the next big thing. Reeves said that the company was about to film 26 color episodes in the fall. Kellogg's had cut 35 millimeter prints and 35 millimeter negatives to their own censorship specifications, before the first season was shown. Now they intended to replace the first black and white shows altogether.

"George was very ebullient when I ran into him on the street a week before his death," declares Fred Crane. "He told me he was getting behind the camera instead of in front of it. He didn't relish the idea of being a comic strip character at all. He didn't want to deal with the realization he was a hero to millions of kids, and that's what got him into directing. George was excited about the prospect of directing — he would have made a great director. A director had to be good with people, and George fit that mold. When I first found out about George's demise, I was broadcasting in Los Angeles, and I saw it come over the Teletype. I was shocked. I know he was boozing it a little bit, and taking a few pills — whether the pills were a result of the accident in April of 1959, or George's attempt to lose a little weight to get in shape for *Superman*, I don't know. I still don't believe he killed himself. Can you imagine George being so Goddamn inept that he'd pop five bullets in the wall, and then pop one in his temple? This man had a future. I must stress, he would have been a great director, had he been given the chance. When we met that day, it was at a stop light on Sunset Boulevard. He was enthusiastic, and I was happy for him."





"George didn't kill himself. I had too much intimate knowledge of the gentleman. I think that George met his end in a struggle for a gun. To my mind, that's the only logical explanation. If we had the crime labs (and DNA testing) we have today in 1959, a lot of these Hollywood mysteries would be cleared up. I am sure with careful investigation with today's technology, we could have found out who killed George. I just can't give the suicide verdict any credit. He had too much going for him.

"I do know George's sense of humor, and he probably would have made a joke about his own demise. 'I wasn't content with being a mighty Tarleton Twin, I had to go and be Superman, and I o.d.'d on kryptonite, and went clean out of this world.' That was the kind of humor George had.

"Let's face it, George was the de-



*George with producer Whitney Ellsworth's wife Jane and an unidentified friend at a Myasthenia Gravis fundraiser.*

finite Superman. And George was getting a little pudgy — that's something that comes to us all as we grow older. On top of that, George's Superman suit was padded with latex muscles. It's easy to understand his discomfort in this getup. George said one day, when I had had a suit shipped to me from my mother in New Orleans, and I was the same size that I had been back in the *Gone With The Wind* days, 'Damn! I wish I was you! You don't seem to have gained a pound over the years.' He said, 'I wish to Christ I had your physique!'

"Needless to say, it is just a pity George left. I was very, very much saddened at his death. But then, life isn't fair, the fair is in Pomona. We must joyfully accept life's sorrows. There is no other way. It's called putting up with it."

June 16, 1959, an early Tuesday morning, TV's *Man of Steel* left planet Earth. All the official stories of what went on that Tuesday morning vary with each source that reports what was officially indicated a suicide. The reported story is, that sometime after midnight, William Bliss and Carol Van Ronkel decided (at the urging of Carol's husband, screenwriter Rip Van Ronkel) to go and party with the decedent and his fiancée, Lenore Lemmon. Another house guest was writer Robert Condon, who was doing a biographical magazine piece on Reeves at the time. The story goes, that Lenore had accidentally left the porch light on. She has said (in one of her last interviews) that the porch

light being on meant that friends were free to drop by, because George was receiving at Chez Reeves; if off, it meant Reeves wasn't receiving.

This particular night, Lenore neglected to turn off the porch light after Reeves and house guest Condon retired. Bliss and Von Ronkel knocked on the door, thinking they had the green light to party with Reeves and friends. When Lenore admitted them, all was fine until Reeves emerged from his bedroom, and told them off about the late hour of their arrival. Supposedly, Reeves' heated behavior even shocked Reeves, and he soon apologized. It is said they all had a round of drinks, and Reeves bid all a good night, and went upstairs to retire.

At this point, Lenore Lemmon is quoted as saying to the others, after Reeves disappeared into his bedroom over the garage, "That George, he's going to shoot him-

self!" Party guests were reported to have heard a drawer open, and the muffled noises of a gun being removed from the drawer, and then a shot. This story basically emanates from Lenore. The morning after, in a newspaper article, she denied saying anything about her psychic ability to predict her fiancé's demise. But after a momentary lapse of reason the morning after, she stuck to her story up until the time of her death, — some of the time.

Another interesting footnote is Lenore left Los Angeles within a week of George's death, never to return. It is most unusual to let a possible suspect in a homicide and/or unproven suicide leave the city where the crime took place, let alone the state. Maybe this is due to the fact that Lenore's attorney, Edward Bennett Williams, who had represented such shady figures as Jimmy Hoffa, Mickey Cohen, and "Tailgunner" Joe McCarthy, had advised her to stop talking to the press. Strangely, while new revelations were occurring daily in this case, Lenore was never subpoenaed to give testimony in a Los Angeles court. This may have been a result of her attorney's wheeling and dealing. Months later, Lenore left for an extended vacation in Europe. She never attended George's funeral, and after her European vacation, seemed to disappear altogether.

The fact is, George Reeves died from a 30 caliber Luger wound to the head. The man had died. The myth would live on!

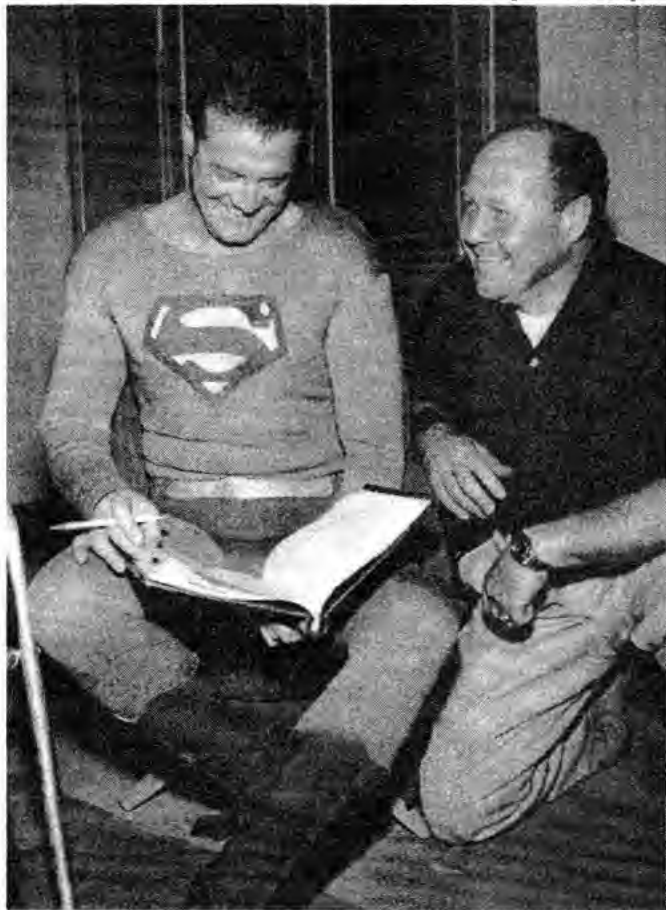
## Chapter Eight

### Sirens Break The Silence In Benedict Canyon

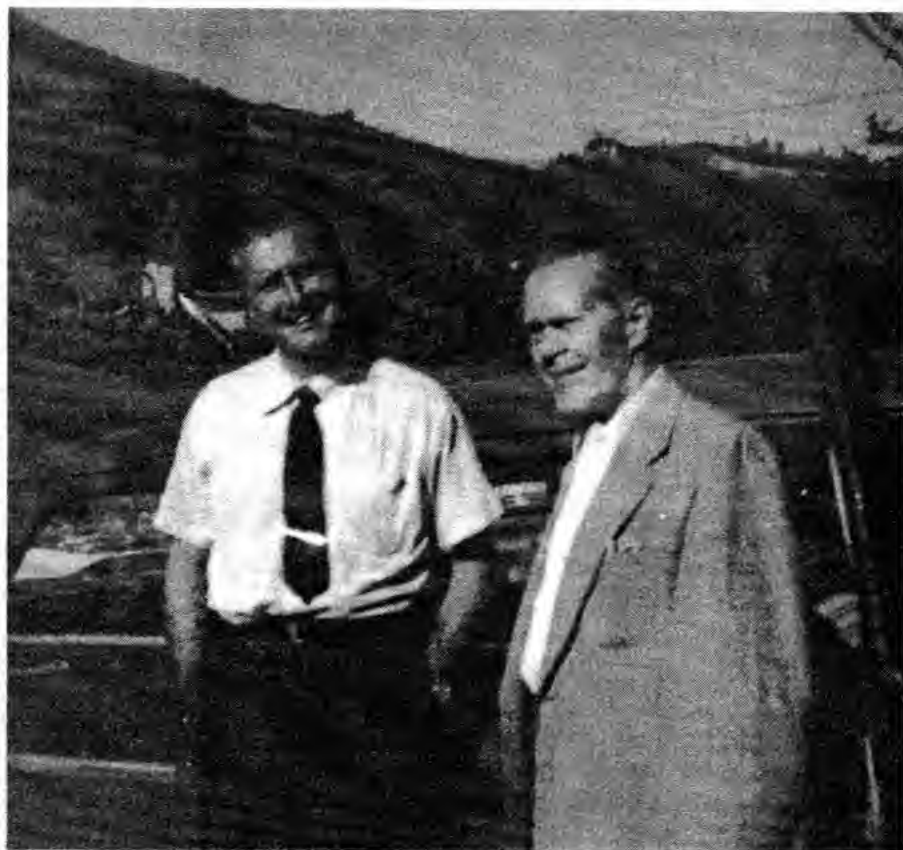
"Toni called me at 4:30 or 5:00 a.m., the morning George was shot," says Phyllis Coates. "She said the 'boy' was dead. She woke me up, and at first I didn't understand what she was talking about. She said, 'George is dead. He's been murdered!' I don't remember her crying; she seemed hysterical. She was hyperventilating, and ranting. She wanted me to go over to the house with her. I absolutely would not go over to that house, after what took place, and I told Toni so. I suggested that she get Jack Larson to go with her, as I had a call that morning to go on. I was on call for a picture at the time.

"She called me *very* early that morning. She had been doing this since their break-up. She did this with their other friends, too. Toni told me there were five random bullet holes around the room. For all anyone knows, they could have been shooting it up prior to that day, or that evening. She also told me the gun had recently been oiled, so no fingerprints could be taken from it. She implied she had been at the house earlier that evening!"

Jack Larson, upon his return from Europe, accompa-



George and production manager Ben Chapman.



George with actor Franchot Tone in Hollywood, July 1956.

nied Toni Mannix to the house. He told Alan Colmes on NBC Radio about the experience in 1988. "I went into the house with her. She inherited the house, and went into it when it was unsealed by the police, after a number of months. It was one of the worst experiences of my life. I only wanted to get out of there. I did see that there were other bullet holes. There were three holes I could see in the upstairs bedroom. The only thing I can tell you about it, is that someone commits suicide or there is violence of that nature in a house, and the police seal it, they don't clean it up. When I walked into it with her, the bloody sheets were still in the bathtub. Old violence on them." Larson disclosed to *Starlog* that he went with Toni to the house because she didn't want to go alone. He also noted that there was a bullet hole a foot above the carpet line in George's bedroom. "It was a terrible thing," Larson remarked to Alan Colmes. "I always thought it was suicide. I could understand it, let me say that.

"Toni and George actually had that house together in Benedict Canyon. She would cook for him, and I would many times go over and eat her Shrimp Neuberger. She and Eddie Mannix had gone their separate ways. She was a very beautiful woman, who had been a Ziegfeld Follies beauty, and married Eddie Mannix, the Vice President of MGM Studios. Eddie knew and approved of her relationship with George. She and George seemed very happy, but it was a complex relationship. Then he left her for Lenore Lemmon.

"After the last season, I went to Europe. I was in Europe when I received press clippings about his death. It's a mystery to me. But Toni and I were the first people back in that house. I once said on *Good Morning America* with David Hartman, that I thought George may have committed suicide. After the show, Toni Mannix phoned me, and asked me how I could say that about the boy. 'That boy would never kill himself,' Toni said. Toni maintained that he was murdered, throughout the rest of her life. She could have been a major suspect, but I never thought so. I could see





*George and Tony Mannix (in hat and sunglasses) are flanked by two unidentified friends in the mid-1950s.*



why some people might have thought that. Toni was heartbroken, and she never recovered. I remained friends with Toni...I adored her. Eddie had died a few years after George's death, and she was troubled for many years. One Christmas, I visited her at St. John's Hospital, just before she died. Toni loved George, and she just never recovered."

Bette Shayne remembers an oddity some time after George's demise. "Bob and I had a dentist at the time, whose father was a general contractor, who just happened to get the job of fixing up George's house for sale. Some time around 1960, when he was working on the house, he told Bob and me that the house, upstairs and down, was riddled with bullet holes. From what he said, he gave us the impression that the people who used to live there used to like to shoot it up. Poor Toni. After George died, she really began to drink heavily. She would call all the people who were friends with or worked with George, at all hours of the night and morning, and basically cry in her beer. I think a lot of that contributed to her death. She did everything she could do, to forget, after George died."

The morning headlines of June 16, 1959, were dominated by such banners as "SUPERMAN STAR GEORGE REEVES IS FOUND DEAD" "TV ACTOR FOUND BY FIANCEE" "SUPERMAN COMMITS SUICIDE, POLICE SAY" "SUPERMAN'S FIANCEE HAS PREMONITION; HE KILLS SELF" "SUPERMAN KILLED BY A BROKEN HEART" "ACTOR ENDS LIFE ON EVE OF WEDDING" "REEVES SUPERMAN TO MILLIONS OF FANS BUT NOT TO HIMSELF."

These stories bore the same theme, but at times were inaccurate. For example, reports of the time of Reeves' death go anywhere from 1 a.m. to 2:30 a.m. One bizarre rumor had Reeves so immersed in his role of the Visitor from Krypton that he jumped out of a second story window, and plunged to death in the driveway of his home. It was Bill Bliss who was reported to have rushed into the room to find Reeves' nude body sprawled on the bed, with a bullet hole in his head, and a nine millimeter or .30 caliber German

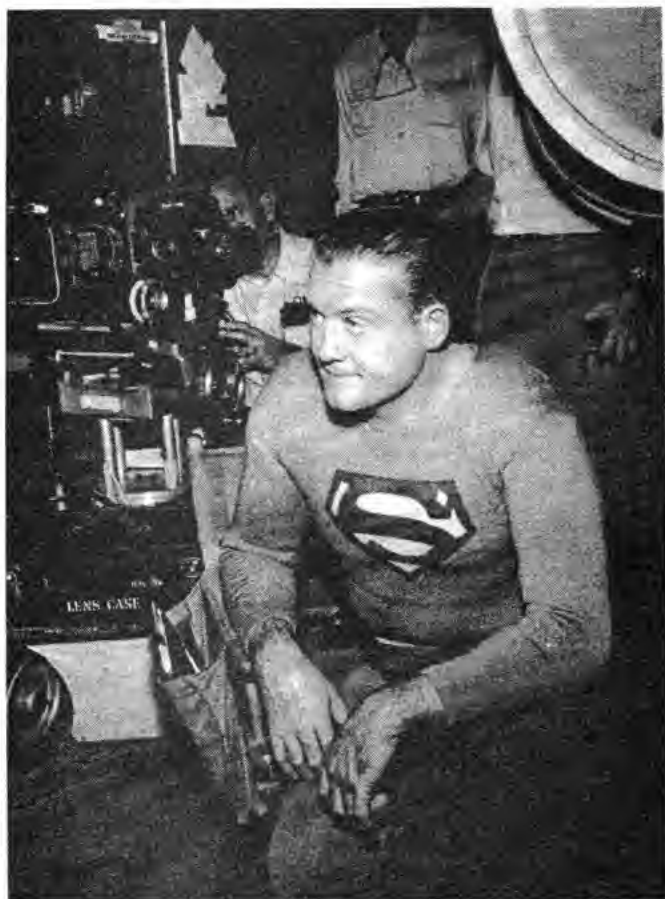
Luger on the floor between his feet. Police found the gun had been recently oiled, and no fingerprints could be lifted from it. This same trick was used in the suicide/murder of MGM producer Paul Bern. A nine millimeter bullet is a more powerful charge than a .30 caliber. It was reported that Bliss immediately called the police.

In one news report, it is said that Reeves purchased the gun several days before the incident, and kept it in the drawer of his bedroom. Lenore, in the same report, told police she was only kidding when she made remarks about Reeves' plans to kill himself. It also reported Reeves' auto



*Photo by Art & Len Weissman*

*George with Joan Crawford at the premier of The Egyptian at Grauman's Chinese Theater 9/1/54.*



accident and the five inch gash he had sustained in his forehead. It was reported that Reeves was having headaches at the time, and was on prescription medication at the time of his death. Several of Reeves' friends, including



*Superman Museum/Jim Hambrick*

*Producer Whitney Ellsworth (left), George and director Phil Ford.*



*Photo by Art & Len Weissman*

*George with skating star Sonja Henie at the premier of The Egyptian.*

producer Whitney Ellsworth, reported that the headaches were severe.

Lenore Lemmon also tells a story of George's heartbreak in the *Los Angeles Examiner*. Lemmon said that "George could not exist in this kind of world. That's why he killed himself. He died of a broken heart. From being Superman," she said. "He couldn't get a part in anything else. He had been Superman for eight years (actually, six years), and a year and a half ago, they stopped making them. George hadn't had a job since. His dignity was shattered. He was typed, and it was 'Sorry, George, we think you're great, but we can't use you.' He had been depressed for months and months, but he hid it. He was full of chuckles."

Another story that addressed Reeves' depression came in the morning headline the day of his death, appearing in the *Los Angeles Mirror News*, bearing the headline, HOLLYWOOD JUNGLE BLAMED BY FRIENDS FOR ACTOR'S SUICIDE.

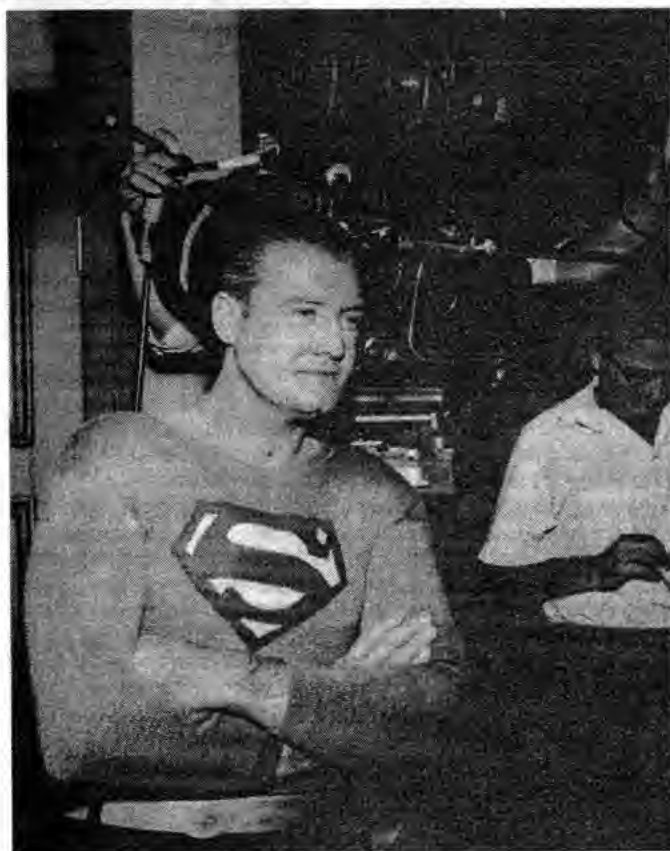
Screenwriter Rip Van Ronkel, husband of Carol Van





*George plays guitar at home as a young neighbor watches through the window, mid-1950s.*

Ronkel, told the *Mirror News* today that Reeves had been unhappy because everyone thought of him as Superman, not an actor. (Van Ronkel co-authored the screenplay for the sci-fi classic *Destination Moon* with Robert Heinlein, in 1950, for producer George Pal.) "George was not a weak man, he said, "but he was soft and sensitive, and this jungle we live in out here killed him. They couldn't make a buck off him any more, so they discarded him." Van Ronkel said Reeves had not had a job in two years. He was so desperate for work he was preparing a wrestling act. Van Ronkel ex-



plained that Reeves still had a good income in residuals from *Superman*, and was not in financial difficulty. "He was an actor, and that's what he wanted to do. For weeks he had been preparing this act, lifting weights, doing workouts, and road work and yesterday he got the report that one booking had been made. It was a lousy thing — a carnival act, and it wrecked his dignity." (This is curious insofar as Reeves had been doing this so-called carnival act for years.) "He was unhappy because no one would hire him. Everyone thought of him as only Superman, capable of no other role."

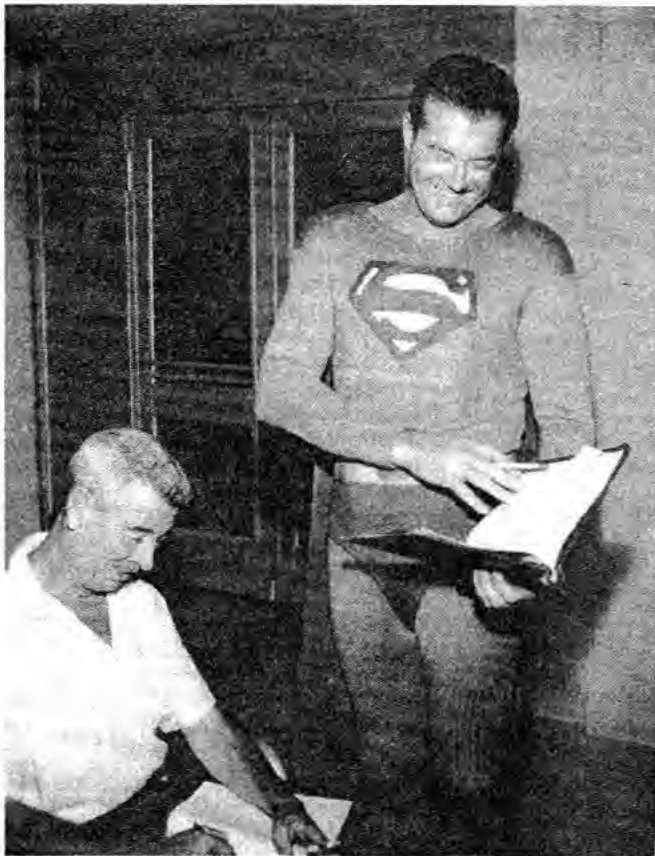
This is another interesting inconsistency. In May of 1994, Natividad Vacio confirmed to this writer that he and George were indeed planning for a \$20,000 tour of Australia, where Vacio would be playing guitar in the band, and Gene La Belle (George's good friend and trainer, who went on to become an ace stuntman) would wrestle George as Mr. Kryptonite — something which George and Gene had had great success with on a 1957 tour. "George also had the



*Director Lew Landers, guest star Joi Lansing and George Reeves between takes of "Superman's Wife," 1957.*

*Dick Tracy* series that he was going to do," relates Vacio.

In the same *L.A. Mirror* article, Mrs. Van Ronkel adds to her husband's description of the gentle Superman. "Superman was a pussycat. All who knew him, men and women, wanted to cuddle him and care for him. He was also like a puppy dog. One minute he would be happy, with his tail wagging, and the next minute he would be worried sick, with his tail between his legs." She said Reeves had his house up for sale, because he planned to take his bride to Europe, where he could be George Reeves instead of Superman. Also in the article Gwen Dailey, wife of actor Dan Dailey and former wife of song and dance man Donald O'Connor, told newsmen that Reeves called her yesterday afternoon about a swimming party he planned to take Lenore to today. (The day he was supposed to have fought an exhibition bout with Archie Moore, the world's Light Heavyweight Champion, according to other widespread newspaper reports.) "He said he was happier than he had ever been," stated Mrs. Dailey. "I know exactly what I am doing and where I am going. I have never been so happy"



*Director George Blair goes over a script with George.*

Reeves is reported to have said. "I am certain that in his mind he didn't even think of suicide until five minutes before he did it."

Also stated in this article is that George met Lenore Lemmon in Florida in January of 1959; that Ms. Lemmon was a member of New York's Social Register, and that she had been barred from the Stork Club and the El Morocco



nightclubs for fighting. (Was this a question of bad journalism, or were the newspaper writers of the time drawing attention to the inconsistencies in Reeves' friends' stories?)

Up to the minute radio and television reports were being given hourly, concerning George's untimely death. Articles on how to explain Superman's death to young children began to appear.

"I was 12 years old when George died. I was absolutely devastated," reflects veteran *Superman* historian David Miller. "I remember going to school and it was near the end of the term, right before summer vacation. There were kids crying, and kids who just plain looked like zombies, moping around. No one believed it was true. It was like the Kennedy assassination — a preview of what was to come four years later. I stopped watching the show until it began running in syndication on KTTV, Channel 11 in Los Angeles in 1962. I was fifteen at that time, and realized that George Reeves was an actor who *played* Superman, and wasn't Superman. I began to appreciate the show on its cinematic merits, and George's mastery of the role."

"I remember when George died," said *Superman* fan Bob Coleman. "I was 18 years old. It didn't make any sense. As a young adult, I had the advantage of being able to differentiate at a certain level, and all the things I had ever heard about him, including the personal appearance tours, his charity work, and his general giving attitude, were direct contradictions to his suicide. It simply didn't jibe."

In another newspaper report, it was disclosed that after George's auto accident on April 8, 1959, his mother visited him from her then residence in Galesburg, Illinois, following the accident. It also reported that the last time Reeves was in Galesburg was 1958, after a fire had damaged Mrs. Bessolo's property on a street called the Public Square. The piece went on to say that Mrs. Bessolo was informed of her





*George and friends enjoy a day at the beach, mid-1950s.*

son's death by telephone early that morning. Later in the day, Chicago newspaper gossip columnist Irv Kupcinet called the *Registered Mail* this morning and said he had been asked by West Coast sources to see that someone here informed Mrs. Bessolo of the death. However, Mrs. Bessolo heard of her son's death earlier by phone from California.

The *Los Angeles Mirror News* asked George's manager Art Weissman, the day after George's death, what Reeves' income had been. When Weissman deflected the question, the reporter asked if Reeves' income was in the range of \$1,000 per month, to which Weissman replied that it was well in excess of that figure.

On June 21, 1959, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that George's mother had hired famed attorney Jerry Giesler. Giesler was known for his legal maneuvers on behalf of such Hollywood luminaries as Errol Flynn, Bob Mitchum (his pot bust), and defended Charlie Chaplin. Giesler said Mrs. Bessolo spoke by phone to her son a day or two before the shooting. At this time, Giesler did not have the details of the conversation. Apparently, this is what led Mrs. Bessolo to pursue the matter further, suggested the attorney. It was reported that she intended to arrive by train and make funeral arrangements, after which the body would be taken to Cincinnati for interment in the family plot.

June 23 the *L.A. Mirror News* and other Los Angeles news periodicals reported that coroner Theodore J. Curphey began a personal second autopsy late today on the body of George "Superman" Reeves, to establish the facts surrounding his death. The purpose of the autopsy was to satisfy Reeves' mother. The coroner said the mother's doubts were not the only grounds for the autopsy. The .30 caliber Luger bullet that tore through Reeves' skull and then through the wall of his bedroom still has not been found. He said also that it is not a known fact whether there were powder burns around the wound on the right side of Reeves' head at the temple. "A sample of Reeves' blood taken shortly after his death, shows an alcohol content of 0.27," said Dr. Curphey.

The legal level of intoxication in 1959 was 0.15. It was also disclosed in this article that Mrs. Toni Mannix, former actress and the wife of Eddie J. Mannix, Vice President of Loew's, Inc., was the sole beneficiary in Reeves' will.

Another newspaper article from this same date states that Mrs. Bessolo had no knowledge of her son's engagement to the attractive New York playgirl, Lenore Lemmon. This drew an angry denial from Miss Lemmon. She was quoted as saying, "Why did George's mother send a diamond ring to George to give to me? She sent the ring three months ago, and I'm wearing it now." Other reports dispute this. Reeves is quoted as asking his mother for one of her priceless jewels, and when Mrs. Bessolo asked Reeves why he wanted the jewel, his reply was simply, "I'll tell you later." Both Reeves' mother and Lenore Lemmon were reported to have been ready to contest the will. In this same article Reeves' personal attorney Milton S. Tyre said with regard to the will: "To my knowledge, George left no other will. If I thought or had reason to believe there was another will, I wouldn't have filed probate on this one," Tyre said.

The headlines of George's mother's investigation covered the front pages, across the country and around the world. **MOTHER OF SUPERMAN HINTS NEW MYSTERY; MOTHER SAYS SUPER-**



MAN NOT A SUICIDE; MOTHER SEEKS SUPERMAN DEATH PROBE; and SUPERMAN'S ESTATE LEFT TO TONI MANNIX were just a few in the early summer of 1959. A Cincinnati newspaper reported on June 24 that Mrs. Bessolo had left for the coast to spearhead the probe into her son's death.

The *L.A. Examiner* June 24, 1959, reported that deputy city attorney Noel R. Slipsager was visited by Reeves on March 27, 1959, to report that he had been receiving round the clock telephone calls from someone who hung up when he answered. Reeves said he had reason to believe the calls were coming from Mrs. Toni Mannix. "Mrs. Mannix was named the beneficiary in Reeves' will," said Slipsager. "On the basis of Reeves' suspicions, he wrote Mrs. Mannix a letter, which said in part, 'Kindly be advised that Mr. George Reeves... has complained to this office about telephone calls by you to his place of residence. In event you pursue a course of conduct which harasses, annoys, and disturbs Mr. Reeves, this office must consider a criminal complaint based on this action. Your cooperation in this matter would be most appreciated.'" Slipsager said that Mrs. Mannix never replied to the letter, but his investigation subsequently convinced him that the calls were not coming from Mrs. Mannix' home, and Slipsager so informed Reeves. It was learned on the 23rd of June that Mrs. Mannix issued a formal statement describing George Reeves as an old friend of hers and her husband's. She also stated that she complained to the Beverly Hills Police that she had been receiving similar calls. She is quoted as saying, "Mr. Mannix and I have been friends with George Reeves for a number of years. I was particularly interested in and supported the work he



*George checks the call sheet in 1957.*



*"Riddle of the Chinese Jade," first season.*

was doing for children through the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation, and the leukemia research work at the City of Hope, as well as the many appearances he made on behalf of charities to aid stricken children. I intend to continue his work."

There have been varying reports on where George and Lenore had planned to marry and honeymoon. Some reports indicate Mexico City, some reports indicate Tijuana, while others have mentioned George was set to take Lenore for a honeymoon in Spain. This was all supposed to unofficially have happened in the three days after his death.

Reports of George's life with Lenore are few and far between. An unidentified source reports that every time Lenore would mention their engagement and impending wedding, that George would tell surrounding friends "You didn't hear that from me." Another rumored incident was when Lenore became angered with George, and threw a \$1,500 antique lamp at him. It was reported George blew off the situation, and made a remark to the effect of Lenore being a high-spirited woman.

Again, from the *L.A. Examiner* on June 24, 1959, there was a reported break-in at the Reeves house after the coroner's office and police had sealed it. Attorney Giesler leveled the charge that \$5,000 had been removed from the residence. It was reported that they had cleared up the situation of the missing money in short order. Det. Lt. Earl Varcio conferred with manager/publicist Art Weissman,





Reeves' longtime friend and executor of his estate, and said that he learned Miss Lemmon told Weissman the money, \$4,000 not \$5,000, was in her possession in traveler's checks when the actor died. She is quoted by Weissman as saying she and Reeves had purchased them together for their honeymoon. Miss Lemmon said she had turned them over to her Los Angeles attorney Leon Kaplan after the sui-



A color test from "The Last Knight," 1957.

cide.

Kaplan confirmed this. Reeves' attorney Milton Tyre, who filed the actor's will for probate, said he had no prior knowledge of the checks, which were made out to Reeves. It also said that Lenore Lemmon was reached the night of the 23rd, and she told the *Examiner* that she had been carrying the checks around for about a month before Reeves died. She also indicated that Gwen Dailey had also given her money, and had planned to accompany them on their honeymoon trip to Spain, where they planned to rent a villa. The article also stated that Weissman took police to Reeves' home to photograph the broken coroner's seal on the door. Police then placed a round-the-clock guard on Reeves' home.

Miss Lemmon in her conversation with the *Examiner* vehemently denied reports that she had entered the house after it had been sealed. She is quoted as saying, "I had no reason to go in there, and wouldn't do it illegally." She also stated that she believed there was a second, unknown will, in which Reeves named her as the beneficiary. She remarked at the time, "There's something very peculiar about this whole thing." (Indeed, there was!) One source said Lenore claimed she visited the house with Gwen Dailey to retrieve a pet cat, and didn't realize she was breaking a police seal. Other sources report that she also took booze and lunch meat.

With all this controversy, the police had no choice but to reopen the case. Indeed, it was becoming a Sherlock Holmes or Charlie Chan mystery. Were all of these inconsistencies merely bad journalism, bad reporting, or were the major participants in George's demise giving conflicting statements? If so, there are a few questions that come to mind. If Toni Mannix was being harassed by phone at the same time Reeves was being harassed, then who could it be? Did George, as all his friends have stated, meet Lenore in New York instead of Florida? Did George's mother actually know about Lenore Lemmon, and willingly consent to give her one of her diamond rings? The crucial element in this mystery is, was George as despondent as some friends report? It is almost impossible to believe that these conflicting reports are examples of '50s yellow journalism. What could this all mean?

## Chapter Nine

### "You Know, It Was Conspirators That Got George"

On June 25, 1959, Helen Bessolo arrived in Los Angeles to take up the fight over her son's reported suicide, and his will leaving his estate to the wife of film executive Edward J. Mannix. It was noted that Superman's mom intended to contest the will, but not as a matter of money, as a matter of principle. At the time Reeves' manager, Art Weissman, in print characterized threats by Helen Bessolo to contest the will, and claims by the actor's fiancée, New York cafe society figure Lenore Lemmon that there may be another will, as mostly an emotional thing.

In Hollywood, police chief William H. Parker disclosed that New York socialite Lenore Lemmon admitted firing one shot in the bedroom of TV's Superman George Reeves, but said the gun went off several days before Reeves' death. The Los Angeles police chief told the newsmen that police found two bullets in Reeves' home in addition to the one that killed the actor. This directly contradicts the June 23 *Los Angeles Mirror News* report that no bullet was found at the crime scene. Could the cops have found these other slugs in a mere two days? Could the cops have found the bullet that killed George and not examined it, with what primitive forensic science was available in those days? Why wasn't there a hearing about these issues? And what became of these bullets?



*George checks a shot as production manager Ben Chapman (center) and director of photography Joe Biroc, ASC look on.*



*Director of photography Harold Stine, ASC (wearing tie), George and the camera crew.*

Parker said that although Lenore Lemmon predicted the shooting incident to friends on the morning of Reeves' death, that police did not find the bullet holes until they pried up the carpet covering the floor of the bedroom where Reeves' body was found. The brief police report on Ms. Lemmon's explanation was that she was examining the actor's German Luger when it discharged once accidentally. When Ms. Lemmon, Reeves' fiancée, was contacted in New York today, she had no comment on Parker's statement. Parker said, "We'll probably make some effort to review the circumstances of the case with her." But he said he was convinced that Reeves committed suicide on the basis of available information. Parker said a second bullet, aside from the fatal one — fired from the same gun — was found in the wall of the downstairs living room. He said it was not known who fired the second shot. This was taken from an article printed in the *San Francisco Chronicle* 10 days after George's death.

Another piece of the puzzle comes from a *Los Angeles Times* article on the same date. George's mother was asked why Reeves would leave the bulk of his estate to Mrs. Toni Mannix. According to the *Times*, Mrs. Bessolo responded that she had no idea why the wife of MGM Studios General Manager Eddie J. Mannix would be the beneficiary in her son's will. She commented that Eddie Mannix was worth millions. Mrs. Bessolo told of meeting Mrs. Mannix once in





1957. She also denied knowing anything about a romantic relationship between Mrs. Mannix and her son. She described them as "just friends." She said that she sure everything her son had was his own, after rumors began surfacing about Toni and George's relationship. She is quoted as saying George built his own home in Benedict Canyon for \$12,000. She also said "It is so unlike my son to do such a thing. I had talked to him Sunday, two days before his death. He said, 'Mom, when are you coming back?' I told him in a couple of weeks, and he said he would either see me here, or stop in Galesburg to visit me on his way to go to Spain." Mrs. Bessolo concluded by saying she had never met Miss Lemmon, and did not know anything about their impending marriage.

The *L.A. Mirror News* carried the headline on the same day, GIESLER DOUBTS SUPERMAN SUICIDE. LOOKS FOR MOTIVE. Giesler said that afternoon he disagrees with the suicide verdict that Chief Parker and Coroner Theodore J. Curphey have laid down on the death of George Reeves. "You have to look for a motive in this kind of situation," Giesler is quoted as saying. "I want to check into the background of the persons in the house the night of the shoot-



ing." The article reported that Mrs. Bessolo and Giesler went to the scene of the crime that same afternoon. At the time, Mrs. Bessolo told newsmen, "I'm more interested in finding out who shot George and why, than in his estate. I have every confidence Mr. Giesler will clear George of this suicide charge."

It was reported Giesler did not ask the police to accompany them to Reeves' Benedict Canyon home. "What would we want the police for?" Giesler is reported as saying, "They haven't found anything yet, except two bullets, and that took them an awful long time." In the same article, Chief Parker is quoted as saying the case is closed. "We believe that Mr. Reeves committed suicide by firing a pistol into his head."

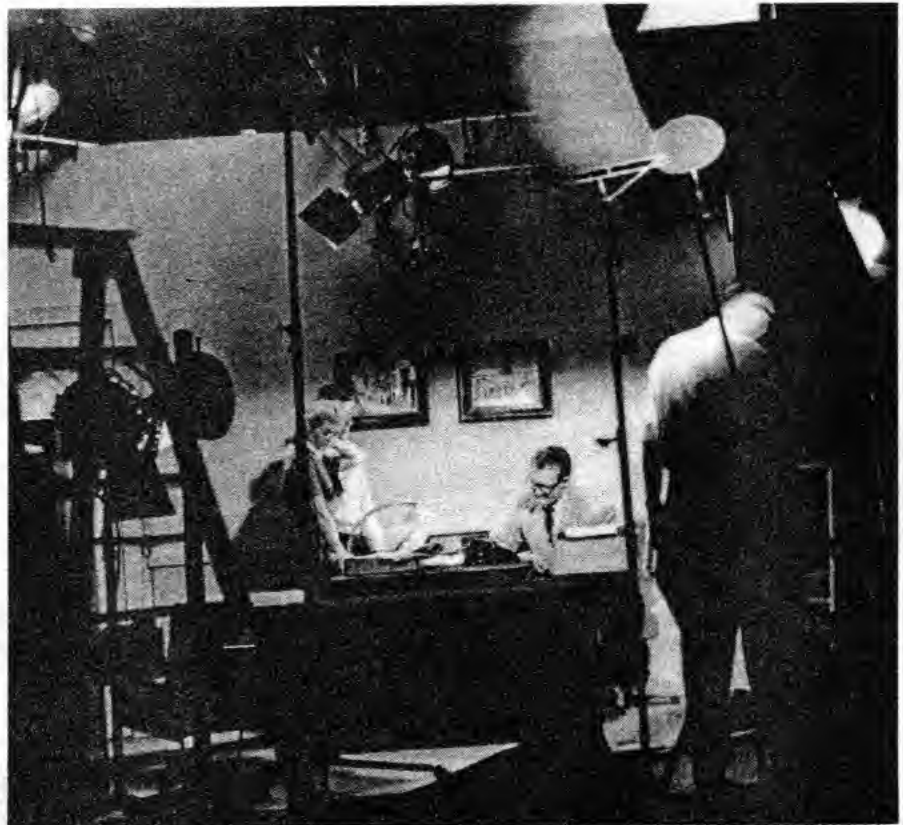
Another interesting element comes into play here. One question that is seemingly left unanswered is: where was the Beverly Hills Police Department? This crime took place in their jurisdiction. Beverly Hills in 1959 was a dedicated sovereign city unto itself and if any assistance was required from any Los Angeles City units, it would have been the Sheriff's office, which patrols all the county of Los Angeles. (This in and of itself is not unusual. Ten years later, the L.A.P.D. investigated, and the Los Angeles District Attorney prosecuted, Charles Manson and his followers in the Sharon Tate murders, which occurred in August of 1969, less than a mile away from George's home in Benedict Canyon.) Was this merely a mistake? Or did the people in George's house call a different police department for an ulterior motive? This question remains unanswered to this day.

Other headlines of the day from the *Beverly Citizen* paper were JERRY GIESLER CHARGES REEVES DEATH CASE IS FULL OF PHONY ANGLES. *T.V. Guide* carried an interesting tidbit June 27, 1959: "Farewell to Superman. Children the world over were dealt a severe blow, when

George Reeves, 45, was found dead last week from an apparent suicide. It was reported that he was a gentle man, and given to moods. It was also reported that he was despondent because everyone thought of him as Superman, and he couldn't get another job. One of his friends wrote a poignant epitaph: Superman was like a puppy dog. All who knew him wanted to cuddle him and take care of him." This was obviously taken from Carol Van Ronkel's earlier statements.

Three days later, according to the *L.A. Mirror News*, pallbearers were named for George. The funeral services were to be held at 3:00 p.m. Wednesday at Gates, Kingsley and Gates, in West Los Angeles. The pallbearers were named as stuntman Gene La Bell, actors Jimmy Seay, Alan Ladd, and Gig Young, longtime Reeves family friend actor Natividad Vacio, Arthur Weissman, producer Whitney Ellsworth, director George Blair, Dwight Hauser, and Hudson Shotwell. It was announced his temporary entombment will follow in Woodlawn Mausoleum in Los Angeles until his mother, Mrs. Helen Bessolo, selects a permanent burial site. It was announced that Reeves' body would lie in state at the Chapel of Gates at the Kingsley Gates mortuary, at 1500 Sepulveda Boulevard, with viewing hours from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. for two days.

In a headline from June 30, 1959, it was stated that the mystery of the bullet hole in Superman's bedroom was solved. It reports that a female informant was granted immunity in return for her cooperation. According to this report, she was a guest at the Reeves home about six weeks before George died. She reported that Reeves took out the



same Luger with which he killed himself, and brandished it. The witness said Lenore Lemmon gleefully took the weapon from Reeves, and asked, "Would you like to hear how this sounds?" She is reported to have then fired the weapon into the living room ceiling. It was also noted in this article that Lenore Lemmon basically told the same story at the time of Reeves' death. This same witness indicated she knew Reeves and Lemmon very well, and reported that George had been despondent over career problems, and was in financial difficulty. She also said he had been drinking heavily prior to the suicide.

On July 1, 1959, Hollywood paid its last respects to George Reeves. Crying was audible throughout every pew of the church while George was being eulogized.

Bette Shayne remembers a lot of crying at George's fu-



With Whitney Ellsworth in the RKO backlot caves.





Clowning around with his manager, Art Weissman, 1956.

neral. Phyllis Coates remembers Mrs. Bessolo as being hysterical at the service. "From what I understand, George sort of went berserk after he came back from New York with Lenore," remembers Bette Shayne. "I don't know whether he was drinking more or what, but things seemed to be out of control."

A sad headline was printed in the *L.A. Mirror News* the day after George's funeral. FEW TEENS ATTEND REEVES' LAST RITES. another headline reported SMALL CROWD AT RITES FOR TV'S SUPERMAN. The *Beverly Hills Citizen News* on July 10, 1959, reported that George Reeves' will was filed in Superior Court.

The next day, a headline reported that Reeves' will was probated. At this point, the headlines seem to drop off. It was almost as if George Reeves had never existed, from July of 1959 to the middle of January, 1960. Only Superman existed, on TV. On January 23, 1960, it was reported that George's mother had pushed for a fourth probe into his death. This article stated that in spite of the second autopsy on George's body, that Helen Bessolo was withholding the body from burial while she sought a fourth investigation into her actor son's death. One of the pathologists, Dr. Alan R. Moritz, told the *Los Angeles Herald Express* by phone that he and his colleagues had found nothing contrary to the original findings by the Los Angeles County Coroner, and that the evidence was entirely consistent with suicide. Dr. Moritz conducted an examination of Reeves at Cincinnati General Hospital, with Dr. Frank Cleveland of Kettering Laboratories, Cincinnati. Meanwhile the body remained in a crypt in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati. Spokespersons said they were withholding burial, pending approval of the family. It was reported another Cin-



cinnati mortuary refused to accept the body because, as their spokesman maintained, "We didn't want to get involved while the investigation was going on." The article hinted at the same time that a private detective, retained by Reeves' mother, had assured her that new facts that had been unearthed in the case dispute the suicide findings. Through a family spokesman, it was revealed that private detectives

were working on the theory that there must have been a fifth person in Reeves' home who murdered the actor. The private investigator is quoted as saying, "Statements of persons in the Reeves home do not ring true. There are discrepancies far too numerous to be discounted." The investigator also reported that no suicide notes were found on the premises in Benedict Canyon.

The *L. A. Times* and the *L. A. Citizen News* reported basically the same stories. But the *Beverly Hills Citizen* ran a blurb on January 25, 1960, that Superman's body was still in a crypt in Cincinnati. It stated that Mrs. Bessolo was not satisfied with the official ruling that her son committed suicide in his home on June 16, 1959, and that Reeves' body will remain in the crypt in a Cincinnati cemetery until the inquiry is completed. It reports an autopsy by physicians hired by Reeves' mother has also been conducted. A bizarre story of George's body being stored on a refrigerator car in a railroad yard began to circulate.

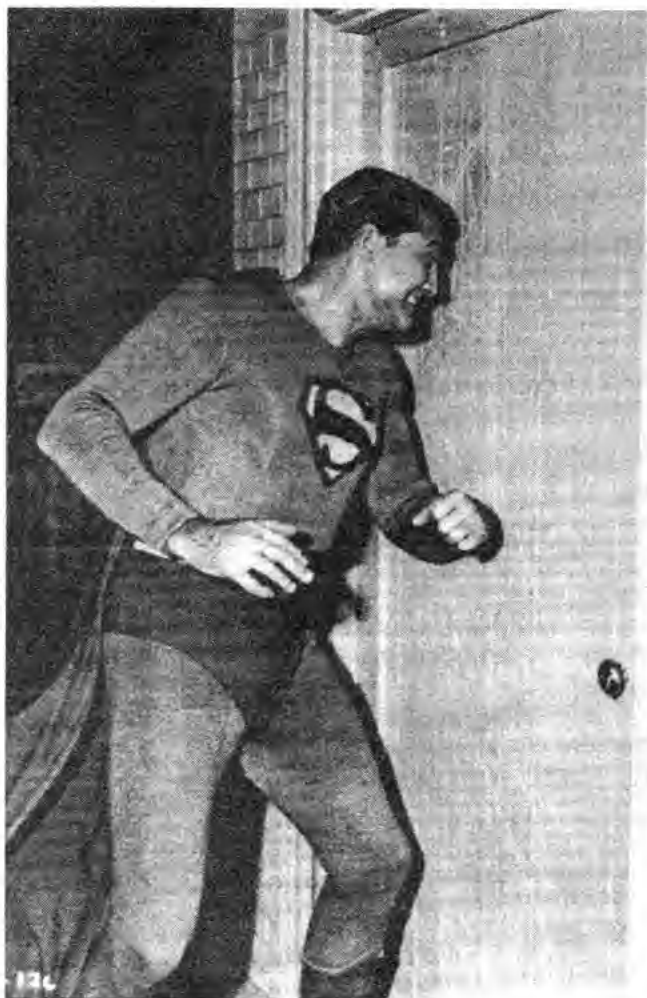
This was the end of what was seemingly an endless stream of articles, radio and TV reports on the demise of George Reeves, until four years later. A June 20, 1964 newspaper reports Superman's mother was dead. A day later, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a headline "Superman's Mother, Who Fought Suicide Label, Dies In Pasadena. Helen Bessolo was



Left to right: Robert Shayne, Jr., George, unidentified neighbor boy and Stephanie Shayne in 1953. Photo Courtesy of Betty Shayne.

dead. The inquiry into George's death had died some four years earlier. It seemed odd that Mrs. Bessolo, after spending a reported \$50,000 on the murder investigation, would abruptly stop this investigation. What was also weird was that Jerry Giesler also seemed to have backed out. From 1960 to 1962, it seemed the *Superman* series and its star would be in a state of limbo. Why did Mrs. Bessolo drop her investigation? Why was there no record of George's final interment?

There were more questions than answers in this case. The cast of characters was thinning as well. A year before Helen passed away, Eddie Mannix joined the ranks of the







In Philadelphia on a promotional tour for the show as his dog Sam looks on, October 1958.

dead. He died on August 30, 1963. In a *Variety* obituary, it was reported he had suffered his first heart attack nine years previously, and had been told by his doctors that he should take it easy. Eddie, it was reported, ignored his doctors' advice. He went fishing, golfing, and to the racetrack. He did not stop smoking. He was quoted as telling a friend, "If I have to cut out everything and not lead a normal life, I don't want to go on living." He also said he had suffered six or seven coronaries and 40 to 50 angina attacks.

Famed attorney to the stars Jerry Giesler died New Years Day of 1962, and writer Rip Van Ronkel died on March 30, 1965. (His wife, Carol, seems to have disappeared). The fate of William Bliss is unknown. He is rumored to have died of cancer.

In 1979, periodicals hot on promoting the new Christopher Reeve *Superman* movie dug up the Reeves case and added new slants. On March 13, 1979, the print campaign began in the *Midnight Globe* tabloid. The lead line was "Tragic Death of George Reeves... The First Man of Steel" (This, of course, is incorrect). The article covers a lot of the same ground with regard to Lenore's story the night of George's death. It stated that Lenore was not a wealthy woman (George didn't leave her any money), lived in Manhattan, that she still watched *Superman* reruns, and was writing a book about George.

In the September issue of *Los Angeles Magazine* from 1979, new pieces of the puzzle began to emerge. For the first time in print, Alan Ladd and Gig Young are quoted on their friend's death. Ladd is quoted as saying, "Bullplop. George was the last person to bump himself off." Gig Young agreed, saying, "George was an ambitious achiever." Young also hypothesized that George was removed by a paid hit man, and that he got some loving in the wrong places. These comments never appeared in print in 1959.

The article goes on to state that Helen's home had become a shrine to her late son, with wall to wall pictures of George plastered all over her living room. She greeted all visitors with a warning, "It was conspirators, you know, who got George. I pray someday the truth will come out."

On December 23, 1979, the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* ran a story (in their series, "The Beautiful and The Dead") about George. The new points raised were about the lack of powder burns around the wound that killed the actor, referred to as "stippling" or "tattooing." It also men-

tions that Reeves had to have been shot from a minimum distance of 16 inches for no powder burning. Any shot fired at a closer distance should leave powder burns or soot. Furthermore, George's head was cocked to the side, and he was looking at the ceiling of his room, on his back in his bed. The shell casing was found under his body.

From this description, could George have been conscious moments after he was shot? Could he have realized his fate while lying on the bed expiring? Could George have been saved? Did he bleed to death while his friends sobered up and got their stories together? This seems unlikely. Pathologists would point out that the edema to the brain would cause respiratory failure within two minutes. Hopefully, George didn't suffer. A mystery indeed. Maybe it was conspirators who got George!

## Chapter Ten

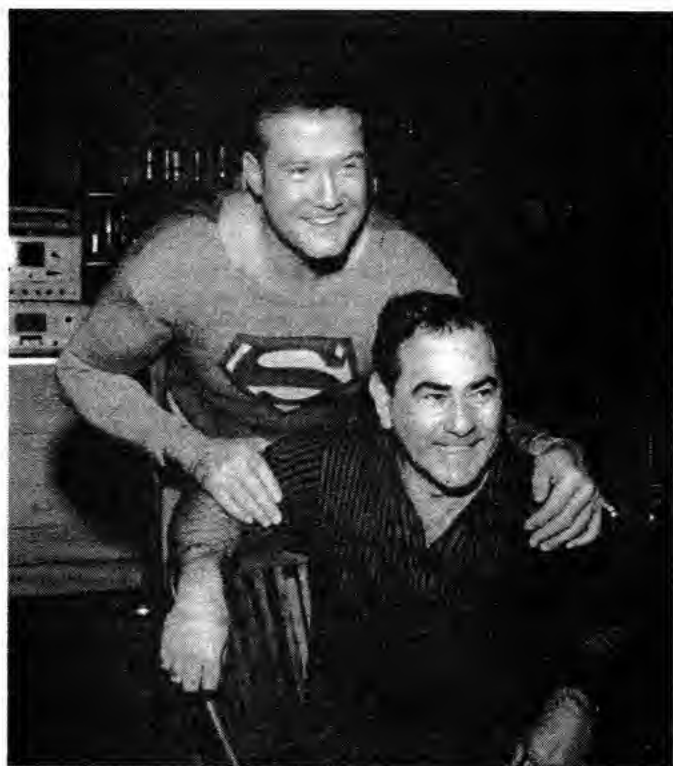
### George Reeves, Then and Now

In the early '60s, *The Adventures Of Superman* quietly went into syndication. In addition to the original 24 shown in 1953 the cut down version of *Superman And The Mole Men*, entitled *Unknown People, PART I and II* was added to the roster, bringing the number of black and white *Superman* adventures to 52. There were 52 color shows, which were shown in black and white until 1965, when they were re-released to cash in on the new craze, color television. For years, *Superman* fans wanted to see the Man of Steel in color, and now we had 52 color shows presented for the first time, to enjoy. Unfortunately, some of the plots and special effects didn't hold up very well.

*The Adventures Of Superman* became a hit with a whole new generation of kids, who would rush home from school



"The Machine That Could Plot Crimes," 1953.



*Joe Biroc, ASC, and George, 1955.*

to watch the exploits of Krypton's First Citizen. Their reaction was much the same as that of children who had seen *Superman* first run a mere nine years before. In 1965, National Comics released a set of George Reeves trading cards (66 in all) to hype the release of the color shows. It had seemed that the controversy of George's death had died down, and National Comics was doing business with the *Superman* TV show as usual. Most of the new audience was unaware of George's death, until they became fans of the show and dug a little deeper, through magazines such as *Screen Thrills Illustrated*, and *Fantastic Monsters*.

A new angle to the already bizarre case of George Reeves' death was reported in the *Los Angeles Times West Maga-*



*zine* Sunday supplement, "Haunts For Halloween." This article appeared on Sunday, October 29, 1967. Writer Joe Hyams (husband of Elke Sommer and world renowned ghost hunter) reported poltergeist incidents were being experienced by new owners of the Reeves house. Hyams wrote, "There are places I was definitely not welcome as a ghost hunter. Mrs. Eddie Mannix, ex-wife of the late MGM mogul, refused to allow my visit to the charming two bedroom home she owns on Benedict Canyon — haunted, reportedly, by the ghost of Superman. She inherited the house from George Reeves after he took his life one morning eight years ago. Reeves was found in the upstairs bedroom, on the bed, shot with a nine millimeter [incorrect] German Luger pistol. The bullet that ended his life passed through the bedroom wall, into the floor of the living room below. The hole is still there. There are stains on the carpet, which some people claim is blood." (Was the carpet relaid after the police pried it up?) Hyams reported that Toni Mannix had been trying to sell the house since Reeves' demise in 1959. He also reported she did have the house sold once, but it was returned. Many people have rented it, Hyams said, furnished exactly as it was when Reeves lived there, but no one has lasted long as a tenant. Gail Kenaston Bertoya, a realtor, had an open house in 1965, for prospective buyers, every Sunday for months. "No one even came to look," she is quoted as saying. "It was a very eerie, weird house," she said. The last tenants at the time of Hyams' writing (who remained anonymous at the time), told him that one night while entertaining guests in the living room, they heard noises in the bedroom upstairs. "They went upstairs to in-





*George relaxes in his back yard on a hot summer day.*

investigate. The room, which had been neat and tidy, was a shambles; the bedding torn off the bed, clothes scattered around. They cleaned up the room and went downstairs, to find that all the drinks that had been on the coffee table had been moved into the kitchen. On another evening, their German Shepherd went upstairs and stood at the bedroom door, barking furiously. When they entered the room, the dog slunk away. This time, the bed had been moved to the other side of the room. The last straw came in the middle of the night, when the ghost of Reeves appeared in the middle of the living room, in full Superman costume. The couple moved out, and the house has been vacant ever since" reported Hyams.

The second story to appear on the haunting of Reeves' house, appeared in the *Weekly World News*, the week of October 12, 1982. It is quoted as saying that after the controversial death of George Reeves, real estate agents were unable to sell the house. One couple who had occupied the house reported that they came home from a party, and confronted a figure who looked like Reeves. Allegedly, he was holding a Luger to his head. This was enough for the young couple, who fled into the night. Two Los Angeles Sheriffs are quoted as saying that they were assigned to watch the house often in 1960, after reports of bloodcurdling screams and lights flashing on and off in the night. They reportedly parked their patrol car at 1:30 in the morning down the street from Reeves' house. Lights began flashing on and off, and they heard a gunshot break the silence of the morning. They were quoted as saying, "We drew our guns and ran in the unlocked front door. We found the place deserted, and no sign of anyone having been there. There was no way anyone could have gotten past us. The back door was locked — the front door was the only exit." The article also quotes

one Reverend Bernard Dahdahle, of the Spiritual Life Church of Glendale, California, having been called to the house on several occasions. He is quoted as saying, "The spirit of George Reeves still haunts the house, and his ghost will not be exorcised until the man who murdered him is dead. Reeves' ghost was reported to be wearing a Superman costume for several of these materializations. Furniture moves, there are sounds of people walking up and down stairs, yet no one is there. There are screams, and then gunshots." It was also reported that the last couple who rented the house were a doctor and his wife, and moved out after 16 weeks. It was said that Superman's spirit refuses to die, and quotes UCLA parapsychologist Dr. Thelma Moss as having said, "There is one house that is definitely haunted in Los Angeles. It's up in Benedict Canyon. That's the old George Reeves house."

This author talked with one of Thelma Moss's co-workers at the parapsychology laboratory at the University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Barry Taff, former colleague of Moss's, recalls "The owners of the house at the time were preparing to sell it in the mid to late '70s. They called us at UCLA, and asked to meet with us. We did the preliminary paperwork on the case, and were waiting to hear from them as to the date that our physical investigation would begin. In our next communication with them, they cancelled our entire investigation. It's a shame, because the owners were vacating the premises, and the house was to be empty during its period of selling. It would have given us the prime opportunity and time to investigate this case thoroughly.

"One has to remember that the Benedict Canyon area is notorious for these kinds of occurrences" states Taff. "The Manson Family murders happened there, Jean Harlow's husband Paul Bern reportedly committed suicide there, and Elke Sommer and her husband Joe Hyams had their haunted house experience in that canyon.

"People who live in canyons are seeking seclusion, and some have something to hide. These people have a tendency to be emotionally unstable, and that's the sort of thing that starts this type of paranormal activity. The personalities of the former owners could have triggered these events. Usually, when we do studies of this nature, they are over long periods of time, and the evidence is gathered meticulously. The reports of the occurrences in Reeves'



*With Superman show accountant Bess Epstein.*

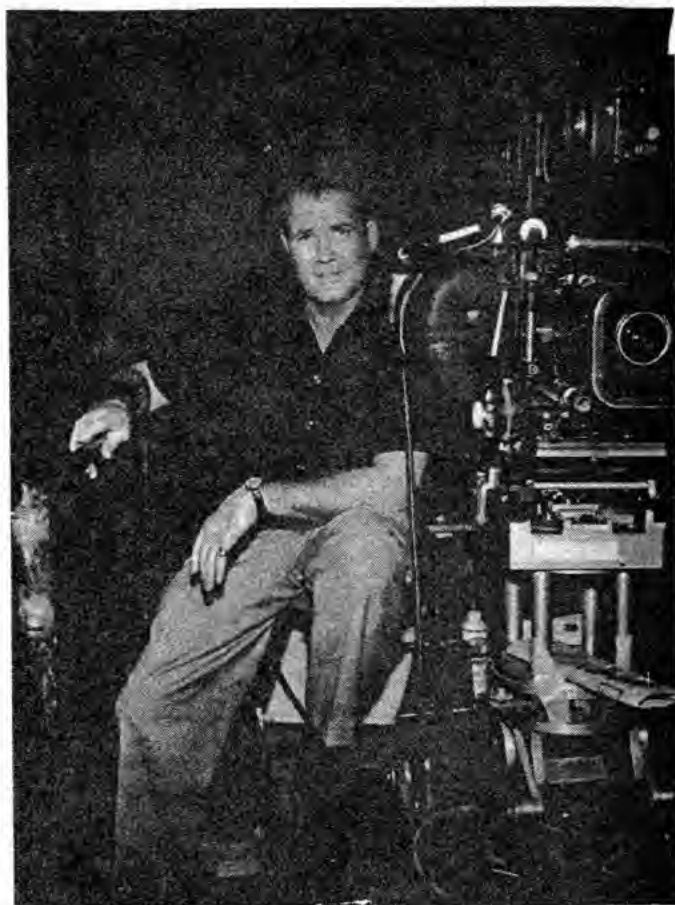
house are basically that of a poltergeist. Even geo-physical elements come into play in these situations. Earthquake fault lines could have bearing on such phenomena."

In the February 28, 1988 edition of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, George's friend, trainer and stuntman, Gene La Belle, spoke of his years with Reeves. He proclaimed Reeves was not a big shot star, that he was the salt of the earth type of guy. "If there was a pile of wood to be moved, he would pitch in and hold up his end like the rest of us. He would say, 'Are you hungry, Gene?' He would order take-out from the Brown Derby — steaks, wine the works. George tipped the delivery guy two hundred bucks. I never saw anything like it.

"George didn't play God," La Belle said. "He was a very easy man to communicate with." La Belle goes on to say that George was shot in the left temple, and that George was right handed, and in no way would he have the strength in his left hand to shoot himself. (It has been reported that Reeves had bullet holes in both temples, the right being most reported.) La Belle claims to have taken his theories to the police officers in charge; no one followed up. He also mentioned that the occupants of Reeves' house still hear his voice in the still of night.

In the August 2, 1988 edition of the *National Enquirer*, Arthur Weissman, George's former manager, claims that George didn't commit suicide; that he was murdered. In this article, Weissman doesn't dispute the official verdict that Reeves shot himself, but indicates that Reeves was merely playing his favorite game, of "I'm going to shoot myself in front of my friends." Weissman is quoted as saying, "This gun and his gun collection around the house only contained blank charges."

Weissman hypothesized that George wasn't aware that Eddie or Toni Mannix could have gained access to his house through their own personal keys, and replaced the blanks with live charges. This idea is absurd. If this was George's

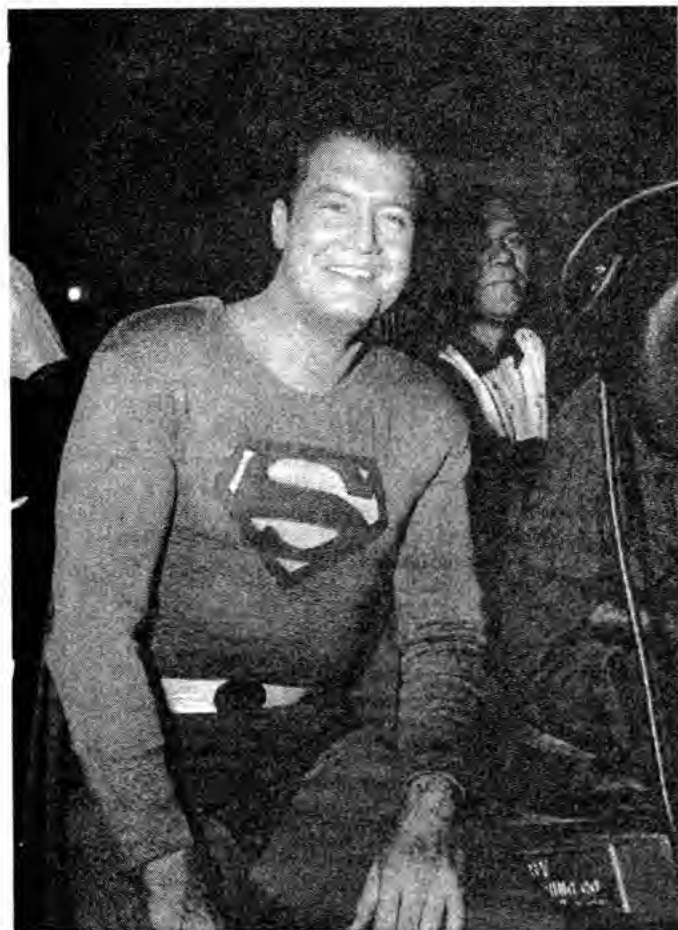


favorite game, why didn't he have any scars on the side of his head from the blank squibs cutting his skin and his scalp line? It must also be pointed out that pulling this prank regularly would surely have impeded Mr. Reeves' hearing. Blanks are just as loud as live rounds, and just as dangerous. (And why wasn't this reported by any of his friends, or any of the people at the scene of his death?)

He also goes on to describe three near-miss auto accidents that George had been involved in within the last year of his life. He claimed all three were due to foul play. Weissman also tells a story of visiting Toni 20 years after George had died. He recalled "By this time, her beauty had faded, and she lived as a recluse in her Beverly Hills home. We spent most of the time watching — at her insistence — reruns of George as Superman. Through it all, she sat transfixed, staring at the TV screen as if George was still alive. For the few remaining years of her life, she still had George." (These silly tales are repeated in the book *Hollywood's Unsolved Mysteries* by John Austin.)

In 1990, a book about the suicide of Paul Bern, entitled *Deadly Illusions*, written by Samuel Marx and Joyce Vanderveen, tells a tale of Howard Strickling and Samuel Marx's encounter with a crazed Toni Mannix at her palatial Beverly Hills estate. It seems that Mrs. Mannix had found out that someone was trying to do a print expose on the death of George Reeves. She pleaded with Strickling and Marx to do something about this interloping reporter. Strickling brought it to her attention that making a stink would only bring more interest to the article. The two left, with Strickling telling Samuel Marx that Reeves had been a long term guest in the Mannix household, and had moved out, and that Eddie had had George bumped off.

The week of June 16, 1989, the thirtieth anniversary of George's death, both *A Current Affair* and *Entertainment Tonight* ran pieces on the mystery of George Reeves. In what is seemingly her first television appearances, Lenore Lemmon appeared on both shows. She is subdued on the





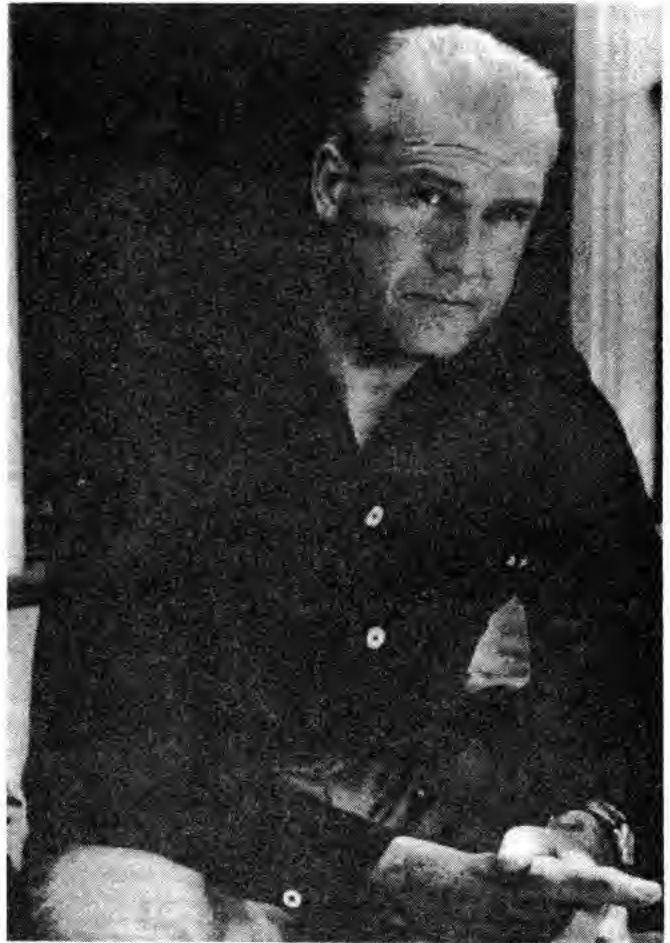


*Entertainment Tonight*, and tells the same story of sitting with William Bliss, Carol Van Ronkel, Robert Condon, saying, "See, that George is going to shoot himself!" On *A Current Affair*, Lenore blew up and screamed at the interviewer on camera, "George is dead, and the subject is just as dead!" She had gained a massive amount of weight, and seemed to be slurring her words. They used sound bytes from full length interviews, which revealed as many inconsistencies in the '80s as they did in the '50s. At one point in the full length interview, Lenore Lemmon points straight up in the air, and repeats several times, "The man upstairs didn't want me." She also mutters, "We had to keep up the myth of Superman." Lenore was asked if she knew any gangsters. She replied, "Only the good ones," and told of luncheons that she and several lady friends had with the eminent Mr. Frank Costello. It seems that Mr. Costello left \$100 bills under all her lady friends' plates.

She goes on to report that William Bliss (a name she can't remember until she is read a list of the house guests that were supposedly there that night at the party) started the whole thing. But she gives no details. She also claims to have called the infamous madam Polly Adler to drive all the way over from Burbank to Beverly Hills, to get Robert Condon and Carol Van Ronkel out of George's spare bedroom downstairs, because she and William Bliss did not want Van Ronkel and Condon to be caught in a sex act.

She also cracked that George couldn't send home for money from Momma any more, and that as far as his career went, he was stuck. No one wanted Superman. She described herself as an Eastern girl, who didn't fit in well with Beverly Hills society. She also reveals the name of the man who she believed was harassing George on the phone, a man named Santiago. Phyllis Coates responds when told of this recently, "Santiago was Toni's handyman and gardener. He worked around the estate, and who knows, maybe Toni hired him to make those calls from another location. She was just that jealous." Lenore Lemmon also goes on to say that the Luger was Eddie Mannix's gun.

Fred Crane heard a similar story in regard to William Bliss. "I knew Bill Bliss when I lived on Easton Drive, up in



*Superman Museum/Jim Hambrick*

*George a month before his death on the front porch of his Benedict Canyon home.*

Benedict Canyon. What I heard happened that night was, Bliss was sitting down on the patio with his date, and George went to his bedroom window, which was above the patio, and bade Bill and his date greetings 'au natural.' Bliss was angered at this, and called George several choice names, and told him not to be an ass, and to go get his clothes on."

According to other friends who knew George at the time, this seems rather out of character for George to be parading around his house in his birthday suit, with guests present.

The late Hal Smith, who played "Otis" the town drunk on *The Andy Griffith Show* told this writer in 1993, shortly before his death, that his agent, who lived next door to Reeves, heard one shot that night/morning. There were neighbors who heard the screeching of car tires shortly after the shots were heard.

Today, Benedict Canyon is a busy thoroughfare. But the distance from the Reeves house to Rip Van Ronkel's house is still approximately a mile to a mile and a half. This writer drove from George's driveway to the former Van Ronkel residence three times on a Spring day in 1994. The top time was 90 seconds, and the lesser time was around 60 seconds. Could party guests have been stashed up the road at the Van Ronkel estate?

This was referred to at the time as a Hollywood party gone wrong.

The autopsy report answers as many questions as it poses. The autopsy was not conducted by Theodore J. Curphey, Coroner, but was conducted by Alexander Griswold, Deputy Medical Examiner, on June 23, 1959, at 1:45 pm. The report gives vague details on the gunshot wound to Reeves' head. It notes that there are a right temple entrance wound

and a left head exit wound, and describes these openings as having been sewn together with twine by the embalmer, and are not subject to accurate description. It gives the dimensions of the wounds, and states that the entrance wound was to the right temple, and the exit wound was to the left temple. It does not mention powder burning on either wound, or on Reeves' right hand. It notes bruises and abrasions to the head, the torso, and the extremities of the decedent. There are two curious bruises and abrasions, one of which occurs on the left side of George's head (but the report does not specify if this is near the exit wound), and a quarter-inch superficial wound on the left fourth toe. It also reports three one-inch bruises on George's right chest area, and in one report George's height is listed at 5'11" and his weight is listed at 180 pounds. Could the bruises on George's body have been from a beating prior to his death?

Dr. Paul Hanson met George Reeves the weekend of June 13, 1959 at a dinner party given by James and Wendy Miller. George was at the party with Lenore Lemmon, and after dinner, at the urging of Dr. Hanson's son Paul, Jr. and several other children in attendance, George and Dr. Hanson staged an impromptu wrestling match. Speaking to this writer from his Southern California home in March, 1995, he disclosed that the bruises mentioned on George in the autopsy report could not have been caused by their wrestling match. Dr. Hanson was the general surgeon in charge of Emergency at St. Luke's Hospital in Pasadena. "George and I wrestled for the kids at the dinner party that night. I was just over six feet and 200 pounds and in good shape, and could have lifted George over my head. We did this exhibition for the kids, and we basically just threw each other around the room. I sustained no bruises, and I'm sure George had none as well," Hanson said.

This writer read the autopsy report to Dr. Hanson, and his response was that there was no way that these bruises could have been caused by him or a trainer. "It would seem to me," Dr. Hanson responded, "that these bruises were inflicted by a weapon, especially the head bruise; coupled with the fact that he was embalmed before the autopsy was conducted seems highly suspicious to me. It would seem likely that those bruises were inflicted by a weapon, rather than by struggling with another individual. Furthermore," Dr. Hanson concluded, "it's also highly irregular in a suicide case that the body would have been embalmed before the autopsy."

"George complained to me about the fact that he was getting no residuals from *Superman*, and he was mad as hell. But he expressed his dissatisfaction in such a way that it would be like you or I losing \$100. He had also mentioned that he was fairly certain that there would be another round of *Supermans*. He and his lady friend seemed quite friendly, and we were all under the impression they were soon to be married. What a shame his life was cut short."

One actor who did several *Superman* TV shows with George Reeves, told this writer in 1987, that he believed that Lenore Lemmon and George were struggling for the gun in the heat of an argument. Several others agree with this theory.

The possibility did exist that Toni Mannix could have gone over to George's house that night, and started up with Lenore. Other sources have stated Toni was at the house that night. It is possible that Toni was there, and could have gotten into it with George and Lenore. Could Toni and Lenore have been struggling for the gun, while George and onlookers watched? Could George have been chased through the downstairs to his upstairs bedroom by either Lenore or Toni, firing his 30 caliber Luger? Some have suggested that ill as he was, Eddie Mannix put a ladder up to George's bedroom, and shot him through the window. Did George and William Bliss struggle for the gun as has been



hinted at, and have an antagonistic evening that ended in George's own murder?

Could this have been a wild party that got out of hand? With drinking and gunplay, and maybe a few prescription pills? Could Honest George have fallen in with a crowd of hoodlums? Why was George's body embalmed before the first autopsy was even held? Lenore wanted him cremated; Toni wanted him buried. Why was Lenore Lemmon allowed to leave town and go back to New York, never to return to California? Why was she allowed to leave the country for a European vacation shortly thereafter? Peculiar indeed.

George's longtime friend, Natividad Vacio, solved the mystery of why the investigation was halted. "We went around with George's mother, Mrs. Bessolo, and the Nick Harris Detective Agency of Beverly Hills, for about three months, looking for clues. The detective agency finally turned up a list of about 40 people, 13 or 14 of whom were implicated in George's death that night. Mrs. Bessolo was only interested in finding out whether or not her son actually committed suicide. At that time, the Nick Harris Detective Agency satisfied her curiosity as to whether or not George killed himself. She did not press charges against the 13 or 14 people directly implicated in George's death. She, like George, loved people. That's where he got it from. Both of them had a great, great love for people. We should remember all of the charity work that George did. All the favors he did for friends, and all the money he unselfishly gave out to actors all over this town. His line was always, 'Here's a hundred, kid. Now go out and make that first million.'"

There have been rumors that Superman's mom was threatened by the mob. There is no documentation either way on this issue. In a radio interview with Alan Colmes, Noel Neill responded to questions about George's possible involvement with the mob. Miss Neill replied, "No. George





*George's urn in Pasadena, California.*

was too intelligent to do anything like that."

On New Year's Day of 1990, Lenore Lemmon was found dead in her New York City apartment. It was reported she died of natural causes.

In an interesting *ibid* published September 6, 1993, in the *New York Daily News*, in a column by Charlotte Hays entitled "Charlotte's Web," Ms. Hays noted that *Penthouse Magazine* columnist Sharon Churcher in her "USA Confidential" column reported that author Lee Saylor had been conducting a series of interviews for a forthcoming book, that indicated there was a more sexually sinister motive for George Reeves' death. The piece on Saylor was published in *Penthouse* October, 1993. Saylor related that his interviews were conducted with witnesses to George and Toni's affair. He maintains that Toni Mannix had discovered that George was bisexual, and that after his break with Toni, she was threatening to expose him, a revelation which would have ruined his career. Saylor maintains Reeves was washing down painkillers with booze the night he killed himself, and just said, 'To hell with it,' pulled out his Luger, and blew his brains out. Saylor reports that private sleuth Milo Speriglio was convinced that either Eddie or Toni Mannix had Reeves bumped off, and had a paid Mafia hitman do the killing. Speriglio is quoted as saying that his investigation revealed the fact that Reeves was secretly having gay affairs. He mentions that it was well known in Hollywood, but that he would not wish to officially state that Reeves was bisexual. Churcher's column also maintains that Eddie Mannix and his wife Toni are now long dead, but that Toni Mannix' sister, Florice Talley, when asked for comment stated that everyone was wrong. She maintains that Toni and George never had an affair, nor was George bisexual, and she added that she didn't think George had the courage to commit suicide.

When asked to comment on this in 1994, Phyllis Coates remarked, "Toni would have thought that George having a few flings with guys would have been

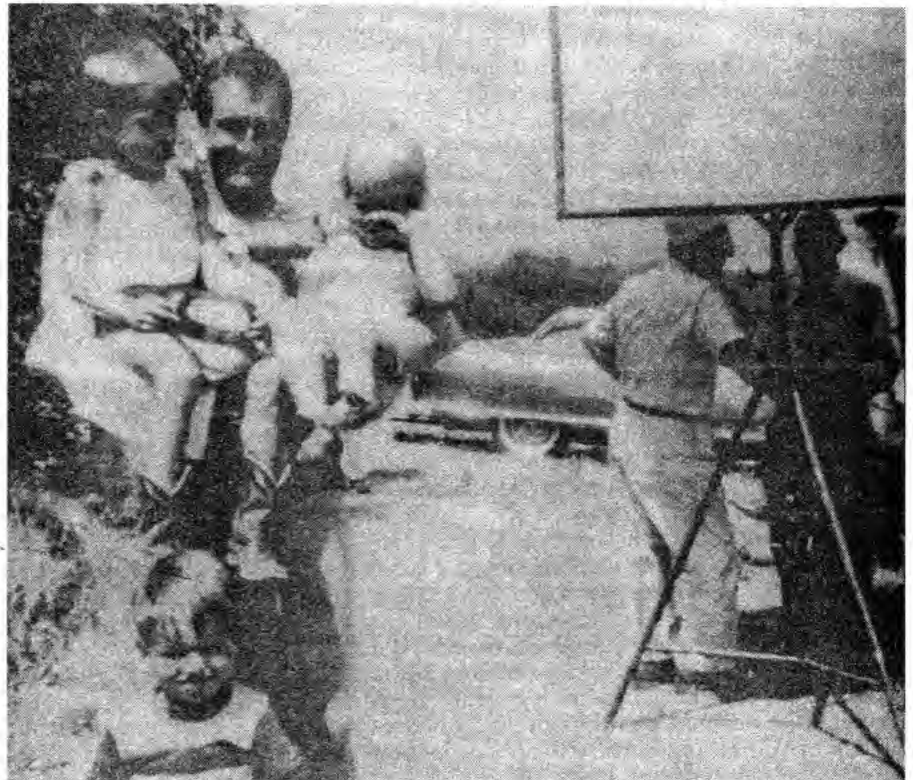
cute. One has to remember that Toni and George lived in Beverly Hills, where there was and still are all types of people, many of them rich and gay or bisexual. It's hard for me to put any stock in Toni threatening George over his sexual orientation. It just wouldn't have mattered to Toni." It's probably that old 'Gilmore Brown's Boys' rumor, that this author has rediscovered. I just don't buy it.

This author contacted author Lee Saylor in February, 1995. "I spoke to Lenore twice in the Spring of 1989. My conversations were slightly confusing, because Lenore had a tendency to mumble and slur her words. At the time I thought she was a victim of a stroke, but now I realize she could have been drinking. In these conversations, Lenore revealed to me that gangster Frank Costello in her opinion was not a gangster, but a 'nifty fellow who was a businessman,' and that he was never involved in any criminal activities. She also admitted to having met Lucky Luciano. Of

her relationship with George Reeves, she seemed to contradict herself on many of the stories she told the press in 1959. Of that night, she reported that she was unable to sleep, came downstairs, let William Bliss into Reeves' house, and that the two of them were sitting in the living room when the shot rang out that felled George. She made no mention of George coming downstairs and becoming angry with any late-arriving guests, as had been widely reported. When asked if she planned to marry George, she was non-committal, and implied that she had not slept with George, and their plans to marry were vague."

(If she came downstairs, was it from George's bedroom? Reeves' house on Benedict Canyon appears to be a single-story dwelling, with a single bedroom over the garage.)

"She indicated that William Bliss made up all the stories



*Left to right: Robert Shayne, Jr., George, unidentified neighbor boy and Stephanie Shayne in 1953. Photo courtesy of Betty Shayne.*



George's bedroom above the garage, looking the same as it did in June of 1958. Gail Kenaston Bertoya, a realtor, had an open house in 1965, for prospective buyers, every Sunday for months. "No one even came to look," she said. "It was a very eerie, weird house," she said. Tenants reported that one night while entertaining guests in the living room, they heard noises in the bedroom upstairs. They went upstairs to investigate. The room, which had been neat and tidy, was a shambles; the bedding torn off the bed, clothes scattered around.

that had gone to the press, including her psychic prediction of George's death. She indicated that her main concern after George took his life (according to her) was that Carol Van Ronkel and her close friend from the East Coast, Robert Condon, would not be caught in bed together in George's spare bedroom. She called her friend Polly Adler, who lived in Burbank at the time, to come and root the lovers out of their love nest. She reported that Polly took Carol home, and that Carol was not present when the police arrived. She disclosed that Gwen Dailey, her close friend, was with her when the police arrived.

"She mentioned once again that the threatening phone calls George had been receiving were from a man named Santiago. She said that she felt uncomfortable in the Hollywood crowd, and that she had few friends in California. She mentioned Gwen Dailey as a dynamite gal, screenwriter and George's neighbor Rip Van Ronkel as her only friends on the West Coast. (Lenore was known to be a golf enthusiast, and it was rumored that she knew many of the golf-loving celebrities in Hollywood.) She recalled her first meeting with George: when someone asked her if she would like to meet Superman, she said 'Oh my god, no!' thinking it was a risqué performer she had heard of in Cuba. She remembered being greatly relieved at meeting the television Superman, as opposed to the erotic performer.

"She concluded by saying that she thought George killed himself because he could not find work, that he was too old to wire mom for money, and that the Superman typecasting is what doomed him. When I asked about the possibility of George being bisexual, Lenore replied, 'George was absolutely straight, and square to a fault. There was nothing about him that was the least bit kinky.'"

In October of 1993, Hollywood psychic Kenny Kingston appeared on the *Bertice Berry Show*, and proclaimed that a famous comedian's wife shot George that fateful night, and the comedian cleaned up George's blood with his bedsheets. One thing is certain: the gun that killed George Reeves was an unusable piece of evidence within 30 minutes of the shooting. The house has been remodeled several times, and any physical evidence to be found there is long gone. In a letter from the Ohio funeral home in 1980, it was revealed that George's ashes were cremated and sent to the West Coast in September of 1960. Helen kept George's ashes on her piano in her living room until her death in 1964. At the time of her death, the house was reported to be in a shambles. She was laid to rest next to her son.

Today, even a deathbed confession from the murderer of George Reeves would be only circumstantial evidence at

best. The physical evidence which could be applied to today's forensic science simply does not exist. Maybe we do suffocate our heroes. Maybe fame is a prison within itself. One thing is for sure — George Reeves took the rap for all those people in his house 36 years ago. Maybe the answer is blowing in the winds of Benedict Canyon. Maybe not!

## Afterword

After 36 years, George still has an audience, mostly 40-year-olds with insomnia and indigestion of the imagination. But an audience, nonetheless. George is quoted as asking fellow actor Milton Frome (in *Superman, Serial To Cereal*) whether he thought he had any adult fans. Wouldn't George be surprised to learn that not only does he have adult fans, but they sit up 'til ungodly hours to catch his act on "Nick At Nite." An act where George's personality carried the show, but an act, to be sure. An act designed to keep kids happy and hopeful. An act with the purpose of teaching kids right from wrong, and respect for others. An act that instilled a sense of morality, and an act that even George, at times, believed in. An act that worked. If it hadn't, *Superman* wouldn't still be popular.

There are many devotees that are keeping George's memory alive. In Metropolis, Illinois, Jim Hambrick runs the Superman Museum. On display is Jim's amazing collection of Superman memorabilia. Comics, dolls, toys, models, and George's actual black and white, and color costumes are exhibited in Superman's home town on earth.

Phyllis Coates has continued her acting career, and lives in Northern California.

Historian David Miller continues his research in Orange, California.

Jack Larson recently gave a reading of his own works, and discussed his life in Hollywood at a Hollywood venue.

Noel Neill has retired from acting. In the mid-'70s she went out on lecture tours on college campuses all over the United States. She has made countless television appearances on many Superman related shows. She and serial Superman Kirk Alyn did cameo roles in the first Christopher Reeve *Superman* film.

The week of the 35th anniversary of George's death, the *Globe* tabloid ran a story on George. It repeats a montage of the same well-worn stories.

Bob Shayne, who will always be remembered as the unstoppable Inspector William J. Henderson, passed away on November 29, 1992, at the Motion Picture Hospital in Woodland Hills, California. A memorial was held for Bob at the Little Theater of the Los Angeles Valley College, in Van Nuys, California. Long time family friend Bart Williams emceed a program of Bob's favorite works, his favorite music, and a tribute to his life. Reverend Fletcher Harding, a family friend, eulogized Bob, as did Reverend William Curtis. Reverend Curtis read a telegram of condolence from producer Whitney Ellsworth's daughter, Pat Ellsworth Wilson. Bart Williams also sang some of Bob's favorite musical numbers. The ceremony was a celebration of life, rather than death.

In the spring of 1993 issue of *The Adventures Continue*, Bette Shayne wrote an open letter to fans of her husband's, George's, and John Hamilton's. The letter thanked the fans for their love and support during Bob's illness. She concluded the letter by relating some of Bob's last words.

"One of the last things he said to me was, 'Bette, don't ever hate anything or anybody because love is the most important thing there is and the only thing you can take with you.' We had many beautiful moments before he made his transition, for which he was very prepared. He said he had a lot more to accomplish and was looking forward to a perfect body and sight again and to go into eternity growing spiritually.

"Perhaps Whitney Ellsworth is already thinking about



something for George, John, and Bob as 'The Adventures Continue.'

"I know Bob sends his love to all — as I do."

Wouldn't it be grand if Mrs. Shayne's vision of the hereafter was a reality? Whitney, George, John, and Bob would indeed be having new adventures. We can only hope.

George Reeves has raised generations of young people, through the medium of television. No other actor who has portrayed Superman before or after Reeves has conveyed the personality of the Man of Steel with more effectiveness than George. So much so, that George in the end was hopelessly typecast as the Planet Krypton's lone survivor. Of course, in real life he was beginning his directorial projects, which would and would not be related to Superman. Whether he lived or died, the fact remained that, like Bela Lugosi was always known as Dracula, George Reeves will always be known as Superman. He took as much pleasure in the role as he could, and took the blows of the role in tight lipped stride.

We, the audience, do indeed put our heroes up on a pedestal, only with the assistance of the media to knock them off the pedestal as swiftly as they were elevated. This did not seem to be the case for George Reeves. He had an escape route, alternate plans, and a way out for a better life in the future.

What went wrong that night in his Benedict Canyon home can seemingly never be cleared up. It is said that the people in the house that night were all new friends of George's. It's clear none of George's old friends were present that night. Maybe George gave a party that got rough. Maybe it was a mistake. No satisfactory answers have ever been given. Every time a tabloid newspaper or TV show runs short of copy, they dredge up Unsolved Mysteries of Hollywood, with the mystery of George's death, along with the likes of Jean Harlow, her husband Paul Bern, Nick Adams, Alan Ladd, Gig Young, Albert Decker, and a host of others who died under mysterious circumstances. In all this freak show atmosphere, George's good deeds, benevolence, and warm personality, seem to get lost. It's a shame, because as George's friend Gene La Belle said in 1988, "It's what you leave behind that counts." Indeed, it is.

There have been no more headlines about the long departed spirit of George Reeves haunting his Benedict Canyon home. Several researchers doing books on Hollywood Haunted Houses have approached the residence, asking about possible psychic phenomena emanating from within. The residents have given no answers, and asked one and all to leave the premises. They have remained quiet for over a decade. It would seem the house has, too.

The mystery of George seems to be never-ending. Thursday, December 1, 1994, in the *Daily Variety* page 19, in a column entitled "The Back Lot" there are two tidbits about Krypton's favorite son which mention producer John Peters is rumored to have taken on the responsibility of producing yet another *Superman* feature film. The producer of the highly successful *Batman* features also intends to produce the new Man of Steel epic without Christopher Reeve. In the same column, toward the end, literary agent Joy Harris is quoted as auctioning the book rights for a manuscript entitled "The Killing Of Superman," authored by Sam Kashner and Nancy Schoenberger, who wrote the comprehensive biography on pianist Oscar Levant published on Villard Press in 1994. The authors' hypothesis is that George's involvement with Toni Mannix is what got him killed. Sound familiar? Well, three days later it was announced in the *New York Daily News* that "The Killing Of George Reeves" had been bought by St. Martins Publishers. In addition, it was announced that *Batman* feature producer Jon Peters was looking into producing *Superman VI* without Christopher Reeve, and that Deborah Rose, the daughter of Reeves' first wife, Eleanora Needles Rose, had an agent from William Morris looking into a possible deal



on a book that she wrote. It is ironic, because Deborah's mother, Eleanora Reeves Rose, announced her book, "The Life And Death Of George Reeves" was complete and ready for sale in Issue #4 of *The Adventures Continue* (Summer, 1990).

On January 3, 1995, the tabloid TV show *Inside Edition* ran another story on Reeves and his untimely death, featuring Jim Hambrick's Superman Museum. Noel Neill, Jack Larson, and private investigator Milo Spiriglio are featured in the piece, once again trying to put the puzzle together.

In the course of the video interview, Larson airs his feelings about the fact that no matter how many investigations are conducted, they can never bring his friend George back; and he wishes that all of George's fans would get a life, and enjoy the work that George has left behind.

The February/March 1995 issue of *Remember Magazine* contains an article by Michael J. Hayde, "The Mystery of America's Favorite Superhero," in which Mr. Hayde re-examines George's life in a well-written, well-researched article, with never-before-seen photos of George.

It's been 36 years since George Reeves supposedly took his own life. There has been no lack of theories, stories, innuendoes, facts, rumors, and outright lies. It seems unlikely that anything but a deathbed confession would shed any new light on this puzzling case. (Even a deathbed confession at this late time would most probably be ruled as hearsay in the courts of the land. All the physical evidence, including George's body, has long since disappeared.)

In December, 1994, George's longtime manager, Arthur Weissman passed away. George's circle of friends is shrinking. Art often spoke of George in his later years, especially to the press.

Parapsychologist Dr. Barry Taff has pointed out that Benedict Canyon is a hotspot for paranormal activity. With Paul Bern's death, the haunting of Joe Hyams and Elke Sommer's Benedict Canyon home, the Sharon Tate massacre, and George Reeves' own untimely demise, it makes one wonder whether the dead are still in Benedict Canyon. But are the dead still, anywhere? Maybe, maybe not.

The bottom line is, will there ever be a satisfactory answer to what happened to George Reeves in the early hours of June 16, 1959? Will (as the vast majority of his fans would want) a reopening of the case take place? Can George's name be cleared of the suicide verdict? There is no statute of limitation on murder. With all these new projects looming on the horizon, will the public, the fans, and the world at large, finally be given an answer? Did he, or didn't he, shoot himself?

George Reeves did, indeed, have his hands full! Did he juggle his mother, Toni Mannix, and Lenore Lemmon? Was he manipulated by those around him? Was he given to ex-

treme moods? Was he depressed? Or, was all this concocted by those present the night of his death? If anything, the passage of time has brought up more questions than answers. Is truth stranger than fiction, in the case of George Reeves? If we could only be sure what the truth is in regard to Reeves' death. Maybe these questions will be answered, but most likely, they will remain unanswered beyond a reasonable doubt.

It would be interesting if a case like Reeves had happened in present day Hollywood. It could well have been an O.J. Simpson-type media circus. One's imagination could run wild with possible scenarios, and the applications of modern day technologies. This would bring up the quality and quantity of the evidence. How much was, or could have been, contaminated by the investigators, the suspects, and others.

Of course, there would have been an ample supply of blood for DNA testing. There would surely be crime scene photos. (Were any taken the morning of June 16 at Reeves' home?) The preliminary hearings would have been equally as dramatic as the Simpson pre-lims: Mrs. Bessolo and lawyer Geisler in court. Lenore Lemmon on the stand! Reeves' other house guests' versions of the night's events! Who knows, the D.A. may have dug deeper? They may have called the Mannixes to the witness stand? Maybe they would have discovered that more than four people were in George's house that night. Would the issue of George's bequeathing all his worldly possessions to Toni be solved? Would the rumor that Lenore wanted George's body cremated immediately be addressed? (It was also rumored at the time that Toni wanted him buried.) Would the court explore the possibility that Eddie Mannix had a professional hit man take George out at a party? (Not likely.)

The one advantage the public at large would have had, is seeing the developments almost first hand. Without hearings, a lot can get lost in the translation. The newspaper and radio accounts of the day vary so much, that a public airing of the facts would be the only way to answer some of these questions. Were there forces at work trying to block this information, or was this a strange set of coincidences? The closest we could get to these proceedings would be a mock trial. The down side is, this would probably be done by TV tabloid shows, rather than by qualified attorneys or law students.

At any rate, it's quite a fantasy — one I'm sure Superman fans have often.

It has been rumored that the so-called party at Reeves' house the night of his death had begun three days before. As the story goes, the party was to celebrate George and Lenore's engagement, and the new season of *Superman* episodes. A bizarre story has circulated over the years that in the middle of the three-day alcohol extravaganza (supposedly augmented by various pills), one of Reeves' house guests reported that Reeves was so under the influence of whatever substances that he was sitting at the table foaming at the mouth. It was also said that members of the *Superman* production company were in attendance at the beginning of the gala event. There is no documentation whatever to support this rumor. Through George's entire film and stage career, there have never been any reports of even remotely scandalous behavior by George. It is possible, though, as Bette Shayne has indicated, that George went a little berserk when he hooked up with Lenore Lemmon. In fact, the only incident resembling dysfunctional behavior was George's auto accident, and that, in and of itself, is not unusual.

But what if there was a party? And what if it was attended by 40 people? And what if some percentage of those 40 people were witnesses to the suicide/murder of Reeves? Quite a secret to keep.

It's a shame George's life is remembered by the public at large because of his bizarre death, and not his film and TV work, his dauntless work for children's charities, and his musical abilities and benevolence to friends and strangers. George got a bum rap in life, which has carried over into death. This author would prefer to believe that George was a very nice, giving guy, who had both talent and optimism, and who through a bad set of circumstances (which just happened to be in his own home), was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It's clear that both Lenore Lemmon's and Toni Mannix's lives went downhill after George's death. Whatever happened that night, it's highly likely that Lenore, and possible that Toni, knew what fate befell George. The secrets they kept went with them to their graves.!

**The End**

## The Films Of George Reeves

by Nelson Jimenez & Maurico Araujo

### 1939

*Gone With The Wind*  
*The Monroe Doctrine*  
*Ride Cowboy Ride*  
*Pony Express Days*  
*Smashing The Money Ring*  
*Espionage Agent*  
*Four Wives*  
*On Dress Parade*

### 1940

*Tear Gas Squad*  
*The Fighting 69th*  
*Torrid Zone*  
*Argentine Nights*  
*Gambling On The High Seas*  
*Till We Meet Again*  
*Father Is A Prince*  
*Ladies Must Live*  
*Virginia City*  
*Calling All Husbands*  
*Calling Philo Vance*  
*Knute Rockne — All American*  
*The Man Who Talked Too Much*  
*Always A Bride*

### 1941

*Strawberry Blonde*  
*Lydia*  
*Dead Men Tell*

*Man At Large*  
*Blood And Sand*  
*Blue, White And Perfect*

### 1942

*Hoppy Serves A Writ*  
*The Leather Burners*  
*Last Will And Testament Of Will Smith*  
*Bar 20*  
*The Mad Martindales*  
*Colt Comrades*

### 1943

*Buckskin Frontier*  
*So Proudly We Hail*  
*Border Patrol*

### 1944

*Winged Victory*

### 1947

*Variety Girl*  
*Champagne For Two (short)*

### 1948

*Sainted Sisters*  
*Special Agent*  
*Jungle Jim*  
*Thunder In The Pines*  
*Jungle Goddess*

### 1949

*Adventures Of Sir Galahad (serial)*  
*The Great Lover*  
*Samson And Delilah*  
*The Mutineers*

### 1950

*The Good Humor Man*

### 1951

*Superman And The Mole Men*

### 1952

*Rancho Notorious*  
*Bugles In The Afternoon*

### 1953

*Forever Female*  
*The Blue Gardenia*  
*From Here To Eternity*

### 1956

*Westward Ho, The Wagons*

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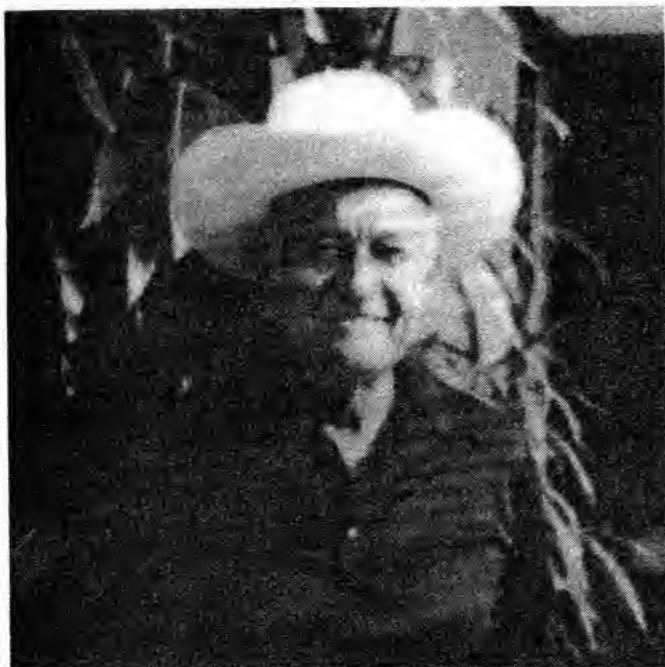


## LEE SHOLEM INTERVIEW

by Jan Alan Henderson

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Lee Sholem at his Hollywood hills home.

Director Lee Sholem was the first director to deliver a believable Superman to America in December of 1951, with release of the full length feature *Superman And The Mole Men*. Through this B-movie, George Reeves was introduced to the public in a role he would play for the rest of his life — and in death.

This kind of believability was one of Sholem's trademarks. He took the Superman character from mere comic book fodder to respectable science fiction fare. In the motion picture and his 13 first-season episodes, Sholem gave viewers hard hitting crime drama and adult adventure, on a shoe-string budget.

Beginning his career with theatrical productions, he worked as a film editor, both in Hollywood and in the military, before becoming an assistant director on the Sam Wood directed production of *Our Town* (U.S. 1940). Sholem directed '40s and '50s favorites, such as *Tarzan's Magic Fountain* (RKO 1949), *Tarzan And The Slave Girl* (RKO 1950), *The Redhead From Wyoming* (Universal 1953), *Stand At Apache River* (Universal 1953), *Jungle Jim in Cannibal Attack* (Columbia 1954), *Jungle Jim and The Jungle Man Eaters* (Columbia 1954), *Tobor The Great* (Republic 1954), *Ma And Pa Kettle At Waikiki* (Universal 1955), *Emergency Hospital* (1956), *Hell Ship Mutiny* (Columbia 1957), *The Pharaoh's Curse* (Bel Air 1957), and a host of classic television shows, such as *Cheyenne*, *Bronco*, and *Long John Silver*.

Cult Movies contributor Jan Alan Henderson sat down with Mr. Sholem to reminisce about adventures with George Reeves, Robert Newton, and even Marilyn Monroe.

Cult Movies: How did you get into show business?

LS: I started with *The New York Times* — this was back in the early thirties — and I was working for the *Times* as a reporter. I enjoyed theatrics — theatricals. We started a *New York Times* theatre guild and we did 38 plays back there in our spare time. We'd run 'em week for weekends. They gave us a room at the *Times*. It got to a point where we had

standing room only and it went on constantly, it was one of those things. We'd work on the paper in the daytime and do our playing at night. And that's how it started.

CM: How did you get into directing?

LS: Well, I came out here (Hollywood) in 1936, left *The New York Times* — I had been raised out here. Got a job as a second assistant cutter at \$26 a week. The first three weeks that I worked we were under pressure. In the first week I worked 118 hours, the second week 126 hours, and the third week 138. I passed out in the cutting room and they sent me home. I was all right, I came around all right. The following Monday they asked me if I would be well enough to go on location to work as an assistant to the production manager. So I went out on location and had eight hours sleep that week. My job was to make sure all the actors were sober enough to come to work.

When I was drafted in the service, I went in as an assistant film cutter. The top man asked me if I could cut and I said, "Yea, I could cut." And he said "There's something I want you to see. See if you can fix it." Well, they had spent a quarter million on five pictures — a quarter million each. That was a lot of money in those days, and especially for the armed services. They were on the things for months.

CM: Educational films?

LS: Training films. So I looked at these things and each one ran about 45 minutes. They had been sent to Washington and they turned them down. They asked me if I could do any more on them, and I said, "I'll try." I took the first one, and within two days I had it down to 20 minutes. I sent it to Washington and it was approved. In the meantime I'd cut the other four, and they sent them down and they were all approved. So the big shot said, "Can you direct?" and I said, "Yes." After that I directed 178 pictures in four years and seven months in the Army. That's how it all started — it goes back a long ways. The directing started with *The New York Times* and went on from there.

CM: How did you get the job for *Superman and the Mole Men*?

LS: Well, I was up for six pictures at Universal. I was told I'd have a better crack with the series than I would at Universal, and I said, "All right, I'll take it." I went out with another director — the two of us were doing these things — we'd do two a week. I did the feature first — *Superman and the Mole Men*. That was the beginning of it. And then Na-



Superman and the Mole Men.

tional Comics decided they were going to make the series, and that's how it all turned out.

You know, those shows were made at a pretty fast pace. I mean, we did the *Mole Men* in two weeks and there was a lot of mechanical work in it. We did a lot of special effects and it was a challenge! It came out all right. Did you ever see it?

CM: Oh, sure!

LS: It's a crazy little thing! The interesting thing about *Superman and the Mole Men* was an insert shot that we did on the floor, under a cot, and we pull back, and there was a man standing over this thing looking at it. We went from one man to eight people who came in and out of the room and then these people, when they went through this particular scene, they left the room, except for two guys (Walter Reed and George Reeves), who then went into another room. We had a feather wall, and we moved into another room of this laboratory, or whatever the hell it was, in the miner's hut.

This was all done in one take in 45 minutes! And it ran just under a full reel. One take.

CM: It's where they find Pop Jenkins dead.

LS: Yes, his oranges are on the floor.

CM: I'd like to know what you can remember about Bob Maxwell.

LS: Well, he was the first season producer. A character — had quite an ego. He got into another series after that.

CM: *Lassie*.

LS: Very successful. I mean, he was a character! He knew story. He was good at story and was a real pusher — thought he wrote the book.

CM: Well, he did the radio shows.

LS: That's right.

CM: Did you work with Whitney Ellsworth?

LS: Yes, Whitney was a lovely man. A charming, lovely man — very quiet. Just the opposite of Maxwell, and he was really the story editor.

CM: What about Tommy Carr?



Superman and the Mole Men.



LS: Well, Tommy was the other director. Tommy's a lovely guy, really a hell of a nice guy. We were working opposite, you know — I was doing one and he was doing the other.

CM: Tell me about George Reeves.

LS: He was a sweetheart. Everybody who knew him loved him — loved him, really! We went out with George socially. He had a problem. I don't know how well you're versed on this story. You know he had a friend — a girlfriend, who was married to a very big man. She was a character. We had been out with her a number of times. He was a wonderful guy to have at a party, because he was constantly entertaining. He played the guitar beautifully. Before he got into *Superman*, this romance was on, and she was quite jealous of him. She had put him up, as far as I know, in the house he lived in in Benedict Canyon, a lovely little home. Of course, this woman was extremely lovely, and she lived two lives.

Then I understand George got involved with a woman, I think he married her, down in Florida. I've heard all kinds of rumors — I never knew him after this. But George had his hands full. I'm only just giving you hearsay, but all I can tell you is he was a lovely man!

CM: How was he to work with?

LS: Marvelous, just marvelous! No ego, no big-shot-itis, nothing like a few of the other actors I've worked with. Just a great guy. There wasn't anything you couldn't ask George to do that he wouldn't go at it. Like George one time — we had a situation where George had to go through a door — you know, *Superman* could do anything. We had this door rigged up — it was Balsa — supposedly. He hit the door and the guy forgot to take the 2x4 supports out! Knocked him out — out cold!

CM: Was he seriously hurt in any of these accidents?

LS: No, he came out fine. No problem. It would shake you up, because they were all action shows. But you've got to expect problems from time to time.

CM: What about Phyllis Coates?

LS: She was a lovely gal!

CM: How was the flying done? Was it all done with a wire pulley system?

LS: In a way. We tried — we experimented on a number





of things. We had a thing that looked like a spatula, a thing that was fitting that he could lie on. It had a long arm and it would go between his legs and back. We could swing him around like you could on a crane on the set.

CM: Wasn't that in front of a production screen?

LS: It was on the set. We could move him up and down, and we had the wind machine blowing the cape in the back, and his hair gets a little mussed up...

CM: What about the takeoffs?

LS: That's all on wires. You've got two wires on each side and you've got his cape covering them. We also had a springboard. Actually, the springboard was below eye level, or below camera level. We could have him jump over the camera. He takes a run, and takes off right over the lens.

This was not a difficult thing to do, you didn't need wires for that. George was a good athlete, and in good shape. When you'd take him out of a window, boy, he'd dive through! Of course, he had his mats on the other side.

CM: Tommy Carr had a little accident with the springboard, didn't he?

LS: We all did!

CM: Oh, you took the springboard plunge, too?

LS: Oh, yes. Sure, you have to! There's so many things you have to experiment with, really! We had stuntmen, and they would many times go through a routine to show George how he could do it. George would rehearse a couple of times and then he'd go at it. You can't help it in these stunts, you know, as good as George was physically, and the stunt men too, they'd have their problems.

CM: You did a film at Republic — *Tobor The Great*. Do you remember who was in the Tobor suit?

LS: No. (Tobor was played by Lew Smith.) I'll tell you, it was an ordeal for him — being in that thing — and getting into it! It was a tough job.

CM: Did Tobor, the man in the suit himself, have many mechanical operations? Did he control the lights and all the antennae?

LS: No, all he had to do was move. All that stuff was with wires.

CM: Did they have remote controls?

LS: Remote control on the eyes and the lights, yes, but he had nothing to do with that.

CM: What do you remember about working with Howard and Theodore Lydecker?

LS: They were marvelous. They were wonderful guys. That suit was quite expensive. I mean, it cost what was in those days a lot of money.

CM: What was your favorite film to work on?

LS: Well, I used to do the "Ma and Pa Kettle's" — Marjorie Maine and Percy Kilbride. Oh, that was fun! It was a challenge. I had one of them — *Ma and Pa Kettle Go To Walkiki* — we did some strange things in that film. We had an effect thing where they were in a pineapple factory and we had 50 people actually on the set. But we did a trick and it looked like 10,000 people. It was done with mirrors and prisms. We shot through them and we got the effect of perhaps 10,000 people in the factory. It was very exciting. You know, these are the things you enjoy doing.

CM: What about the *Long John Silver* TV series that you did?

LS: *Long John Silver* with Robert Newton. You talk about fun — that was a real fun show. We only made 26. We shot in Sydney, Australia, and we had a magnificent company. And the salaries of the stars, except for Robert Newton, the highest paid actor got \$200 a week. These actors in Australia were cheap as dirt. Of course, the dollar went a long way over there. We had a cast of 18 — a regular cast of 18. Some of the stories and some of the acting were damn good.

CM: What about Robert Newton?

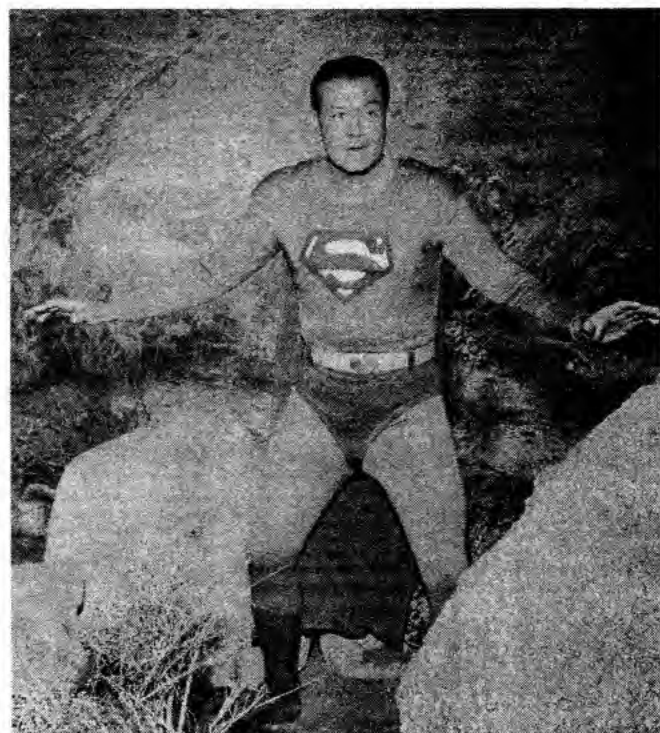
LS: Wonderful character. Fine actor — the best actor I have ever worked with. Barring none. He had a problem with drinking. Other than that, he was marvelous.

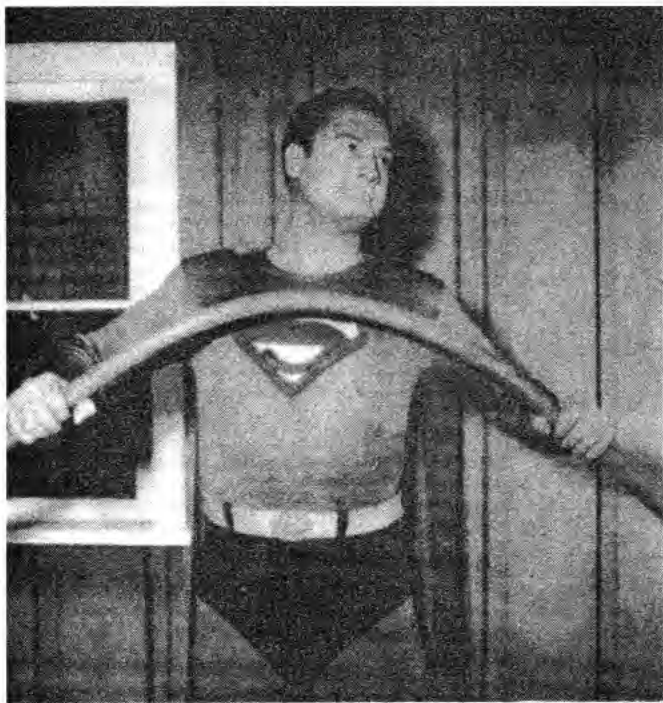
CM: Did you enjoy working with Clint Walker? (*Cheyenne* WB TV show)

LS: Clint was a good study, and this man never made it big, but he was a solid actor. Clint left Warner Brothers because of financial problems.

CM: What can you tell me about the "Tarzan" films you worked on for Sol Lesser?

LS: Well, I'll tell you an interesting thing about those. They were looking for a new Tarzan's mate. Every agency in town was notified. I interviewed 350 girls and out of them I picked about 10. When I got those 10, I took them in and





introduced them to Sol Lesser, and one of them was Marilyn Monroe. And I was so convinced that this girl "had it" that I had her back eight times to see Lesser, and he... turned her down. A year later, she was at 20th Century Fox making her first pictures. Had he had her in the "Tarzans," he'd have made himself another \$3 — \$4 million out of his shows instead of his half million a year. But she was something else; she had it and he didn't recognize it. He went for the intellectual. That's why Vanessa Brown got it. He fashioned himself an intellectual, and his scripts would come out Tarzan films. He would look up his thesaurus to find out the largest word that he could use and he'd put in in the script. Now, the average guy reading the script says, "What the hell is he talking about?" and you'd have to go to a thesaurus to find out what the underlying meaning was. Didn't mean a bloody thing, but it was a big word!

CM: Could you tell me a little about a low-budget film called *The Pharaoh's Curse* (Bel Air, 1956).

LS: That was a fun show. We were shooting the interiors here, and we shot the exteriors in Death Valley. We moved with the sun up there, because we were running out of light, and we had been flown up there, left here about five in the morning, got there at six, and started shooting at seven. We were still going at six at night, and the plane had to take off this little tiny runway, and they were going to sleep us up there. In one day we made 96 camera set-ups.

CM: Tell me about the make-up man who worked on *The Mummified Arm* and the face of the man in the *Pharaoh's Curse*.

LS: This guy was a fine artist. It took him about two months to get that face, but he was the artist that did all the caricatures in the Brown Derby in Hollywood. A brilliant artist. The arm that was cut off, he took the bone of an arm, a real arm, and built the arm up to match the guy. I thought he did a hell of a job! Because you could see the hairs... *The Pharaoh's Curse* was shot in about seven days.

CM: As a director, seeing that you've worked with so many fantastic characters, how did you make them believable to yourself as well as to the actors?

LS: You know, if I can believe an actor when I'm watching him — I always put myself in the position of a guy sitting in a room, or sitting anywhere, watching somebody go through a scene. And if I can believe them, then by golly you're going to believe them. This is the one thing I've always been confident of — if I can believe you, I feel confi-



dent that the guy that's going to be watching that film will believe you, too. I'm a tough guy, I mean I'm a rough man to work with, 'cause I know what I want. I plan in advance, so I know where I'm going and there's no question about it.



# WHAT MAKES GEORGE REEVES STILL SUPER AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?

By Jan Alan Henderson

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"Around the World," 1953.

There can be no doubt that George Reeves' personality is what made the 104 tel-adventures of Superman the second most popular television series throughout the '50s and '60s. Even the production values of the superior first and second season black and white episodes cannot compare to things like Walt Disney's *Zorro*, starring Guy Williams. It was clearly George that put the series over the top. *Cult Movies*' Superman historian Jan Alan Henderson recently took a survey from a cross section of George Reeves fans on their favorite television hero.

"I first saw *The Adventures Of Superman* when I was five years old," recalls veteran *Superman* historian/research consultant David Lee Miller. Miller was a contributor to Gary Grossman's book *Superman Serial to Cereal*. He also was a consultant for the two-hour Superman special, *Superman, Superstar*, produced by KCOP Channel 13 in Los Angeles. The telecast featured appearances by Noel Neill, Jack Larson, and special effects man Thol (Si) Simonson.

"We lived in La Canada, California," remembers Miller. "It was on the ABC affiliate KECA, Channel 7, from nearby Los Angeles, on Monday nights at seven-thirty. The first

episode I saw was 'Ghost Wolf.' I was immediately sold on the show — it was the greatest thing I had ever seen. I watched the show religiously every week from then on. I was absolutely knocked out by Superman holding up the train trestle, and the take-off in the burning forest.

"All the kids I went to school with had the same reaction I had. You saw it once, and you were hooked; you didn't want to miss any of those weekly adventures. After *The Adventures Of Superman*, the biggest thing to hit television was *Hopalong Cassidy*, then *Davy Crockett*.

"Those first airings of *Superman* had an adult time slot. They appealed to the parents as well as the kids. At that time, I got special permission from my parents to stay up and watch the show, at that oh-so-late hour of seven-thirty. Those first shows always had a preview. As long as the

previews were not of an episode I had already seen, my parents let me stay up to watch the show with them. If it was a re-run and there was school the next day, I had to go to bed. There was always school on Tuesday.

"My favorite show of all time is 'Mind Machine.' The story in that one was an extension of an old *Superman* radio show called 'The Voice Machine' (produced by Robert and Jessica Maxwell). Only this time, instead of hearing voices from the past, the criminals controlled the minds of witnesses (with a television-like device) in an organized crime investigation conducted by the government. Reeves and Coates play Lois and Clark as mature characters in a legitimate film noir mystery.

"The take-offs on the mountain road are spectacular. They are the best examples of the wire pulley system take-offs. Reeves seems to fly straight into the camera as the bus driver and Lois watch. The landings are excellent! I would imagine those take-offs were done with the regular pulley system mounted on a gymnast's bar. Reeves leaves the frame with such speed, it's hard to imagine what mechanics were used.

"I enjoyed 'Riddle Of The Chinese Jade,' another dark, penetrating mystery-oriented show. Phyllis Coates had a different hairdo in that one (for no apparent reason). The tunnels underneath

Chinatown were eerie and foreboding.

"Czar Of The Underworld" is a great one. The Inspector



Extremely rare placecard advertising George Reeves' *Moulin Rouge* appearance.



Above & below: Signing autographs and greeting fans on a promotional tour for the show in Philadelphia, October 1958.



Henderson character is developed more in that show. I got a kick out of Henderson and Kent going to Hollywood to work on a picture together. It's a movie within a television show. Anthony Caruso is superb as the gangster boss. Steven Carr (Tommy's brother) has a great in-joke role as Director Carr. You get to see behind the scenes at RKO's back lot, made all the more interesting by the fact you're actually seeing the *Superman* sets from behind the camera as well as in front. You saw a bit of their camera set-ups and lighting, and the technical end of the show. The studio's name was National Studios, a back-handed tribute to National Comics.

"They used a springboard for the take-offs in that episode. The night take-off outside the studio was especially striking. (Every now and again you could see a little bit of the springboard pop into the bottom of the frame in some of those 1951 shows.)

"The backbone of those shows was the mysterious atmo-

sphere. If that element hadn't been present, none of this would have played. It would not have been the sensation it was. Reeves' face, voice, and entire persona are what made that show second only to *I Love Lucy* in popularity. George was the only believable Superman. No one else holds a candle to his portrayal of the Man of Steel.

"Phyllis Coates was true to the early comic's Lois Lane — tough, yet understanding, yet not terribly impressed by Clark Kent. Noel Neill had a far greater romantic dimension to her character, because in a lot of her shows she seemed to be in love with Superman, and friends with Clark Kent. To Coates' Lois, Kent was an interloper, competition, someone she could do without. Her character was an independent woman. Plus, Clark annoyed her with his ability to always get the next scoop. This is the basis of *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures Of Superman*. The interaction of these two characters in the new show is a soap opera with a science fiction twist. Teri Hatcher's Lois is very much like Phyllis Coates' interpretation.

"The 'Evil Three' is excellent. Talk about atmosphere! This one has it all: an insane old woman (Cecil Elliot) in a wheelchair, cackling in an old Southern hotel; the two men of the hotel constantly trying to kill each other. The taboo sequence of the old lady being pushed down the stairs in her wheelchair is only topped by the sadism in another early episode ('The Birthday Letter') in which a thug (Maurice Marsac) takes a leg brace off a crippled girl.

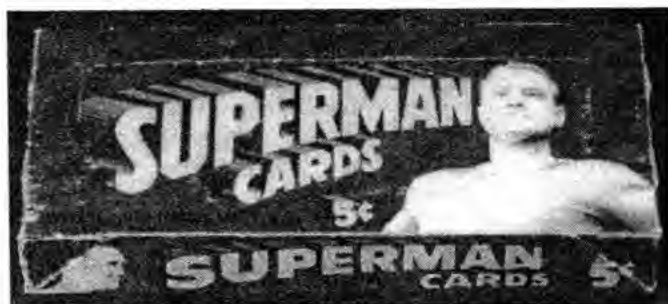
"Jimmy Olsen has to deal with his own fear of ghosts in 'The Evil Three,' as he investigates the ghosts in the bayou hotel. (Most of these scenes are cut out of modern day syndicated prints, although the Nickelodeon prints contain these scenes.)

"'Haunted Lighthouse' is another example of superlative mood: a remote island, a naval mystery involving an ancient lighthouse, a creepy underground sea cave, and smugglers. It's one of the blatantly sadistic shows. Superman simply steps aside and lets a villain plunge to his death, without lifting a hand to save the crook. The closest thing to this kind of hero anywhere previously, was Tom Tyler's portrayal of Captain Marvel in the '40s serial *The Adventures Of Captain Marvel*.

"George as Superman was played straight, but with a degree of wisdom. In the show 'No Holds Barred,' Reeves exhibits his usual bravado in the fight sequence, exclaiming 'OK boys, the party's over!'; Yet, at the end of the show his tone resembles a Chinese sage, remarking 'The only real magic is the magic

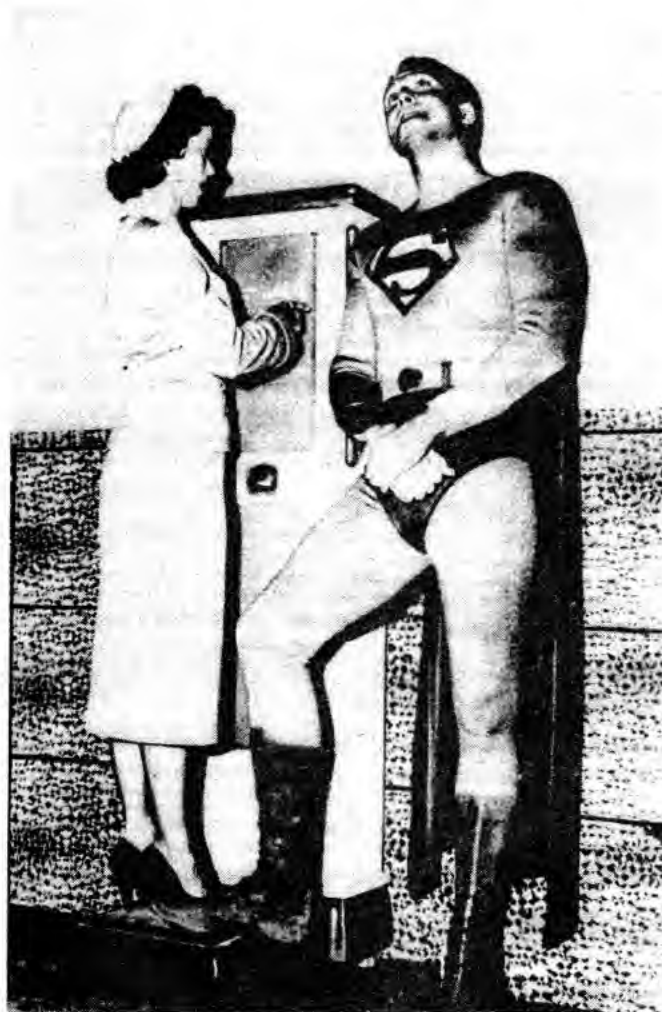
of knowledge.'

"It was this multi-faceted treatment given the material by George that endeared him to all of us kids. We believed there was a Superman living in our world — a protector, a



1965 bubble gum cards box.





father figure to the Earth, someone who would keep the world right. Reeves' trademark wink at the conclusion of each show cemented the audience's impression that we are let in on Superman's double life, while his peers are not. When George died, it shattered all that.

"The first part of the second season only amplified the first. The budgets were bigger, and Superman actually had an outer space adventure, 'Panic In The Sky.' Noel Neill coming on board brought another element to *Superman*. As an example, in 'The Defeat Of Superman' she is almost hysterical over the fact that Superman is about to die from synthetic Kryptonite. She holds him lovingly as he gasps his last breath. This was totally believable to 12- and 13-year-old males in the '50s. 'The Defeat Of Superman' was the first show to feature Kryptonite, which had been on the radio and in the serials.

"*'Superman In Exile'* was 30 years ahead of its time in dealing with a nuclear disaster. Superman tells the scientists responsible for the accident that nuclear energy is new, and they haven't learned how to control it yet. He scolds them like naughty children — maybe they shouldn't play with things they can't handle.

"One has to remember that the musical scores had a lot to do with the mood of those first two seasons. The Capitol cue series was the music library for first season shows. In the first season shows, the music was always sinister and menacing. The second season themes sounded like gladiator music.

"In the episode 'Golden Vulture,' the music is effective. A cue entitled 'Crime Doesn't Pay' (written by Jack Beaver) sets up the creepy atmosphere of the old salvage/pirate ship and its demented captain. Miklos Rozsa contributed



Superman and the Mole Men.

to the second season cues. The fight at the end of 'Clown Who Cried,' and George wrestling the albino gorilla in 'Jungle Devil' are prime examples of Rozsa's work.

"The first season music was composed by Joe Mullendore, Herschel Burke Gilbert and Leon Klatzkin (who wrote the now well-familiar opening and closing theme). Klatzkin was the musical director on the first season. The Capitol cues were used in *Captain Midnight*, *Space Patrol*, and even *Cru-sader Rabbit* and the feature *Night Of The Living Dead*.

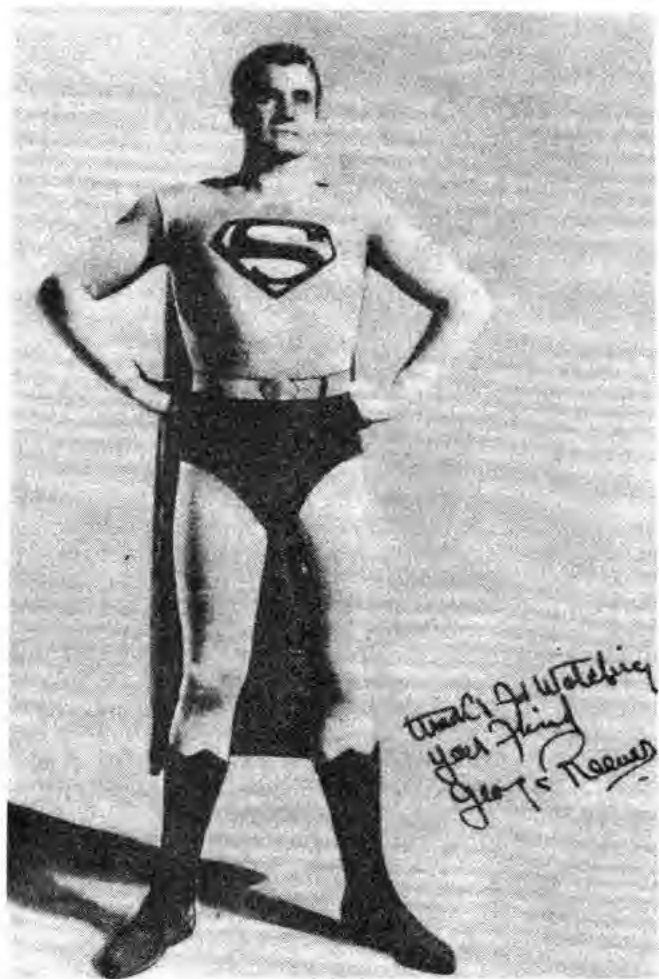
"The last half of the second season is where producer Ellsworth changed the show's format. Episodes like 'My Friend Superman,' 'Around The World With Superman,' were kiddie shows. Superman was less of a threat to Metropolis' criminal population, and they in turn became bungling clowns who always go straight by the show's end.

"That's pretty much the story format for the color shows. There were no special effects-oriented shows, no adventures in space. The color film took most of the budget. There are only a couple interesting flying shots in all the color years. There's one in 'Dagger Island,' where Superman flies around the Daily Planet building. We see him in full body close-up, from head to toe, as he zooms to rescue Lois.

"George looked great in 'The Last Knight.' Tommy Carr was back in the director's chair for that show. It's his only contribution to the color *The Adventures Of Superman*. ABC Network had also picked up that last season, and 'The Last Knight' was the re-debut show for ABC, so it had to be a very strong show for the ratings. Tommy Carr got the greasy kid stuff out of George's hair, and it makes George look years younger. It's a pity more of the color shows don't come up to the standard of 'The Last Knight.'"

Jim Hambrick, the world's foremost Superman collector, has taken his hobby to the ultimate. He has taken his entire collection of costumes, props, toys, comics, photographs and assorted antiques, all based on Krypton's favorite son, and moved them to Superman's Earthbound hometown, Metropolis, Illinois. All of these artifacts are on display in the Superman Museum, owned and operated by Jim.

"I became interested in Superman through watching reruns from George's show. I would come home every week-day after school and plant myself face first in front of the TV, while my sisters jumped up and down on my back, and became thoroughly engrossed in *The Adventures Of Superman*. That was the one thing I truly looked forward to, coming home from school. Back in 1957 it was run Monday



A reject autograph card from the first season.  
Tape on George's autograph is barely visible.

nights on KABC in Los Angeles at 5 p.m.

"Christmas of that year I got a lunch pail, and the madness took off from there! Here we are 38 years later, and I'm living and working in the Man of Steel's home town! After the lunch pail Christmas gift, I began accumulating anything I could find on Superman, whether it be going down to the old Thrifty Drug Stores and buying Superman dolls, toys, Superman costumes, bubble gum trading cards, belts, capes, comics, you name it. If it was Superman-related, I had to have it. Back in those days, swap meets and garage sales were nonexistent. You had to buy that stuff as it came to your local chain drugstore when it was first issued, or be left out in the cold. I used to play marbles with kids for Superman premiums. Now, if I run across a garage sale or a swap meet, it's a much different situation — you can trade and haggle, and people understand the value of these items. In the '50s, your parents just thought you were nuts for buying all this stuff — maybe just a phase they hoped you were going through.

"The first big money Superman item I got was *Action Comics* #1. I remember saving up \$75 to get *Action* 1, in the early '60s. I was living in Virginia at the time (1962). Even in those days, \$75 was an outrageous price to pay. I remember I worked the whole summer to get the money to pay for that one. I mowed a million lawns for that money!

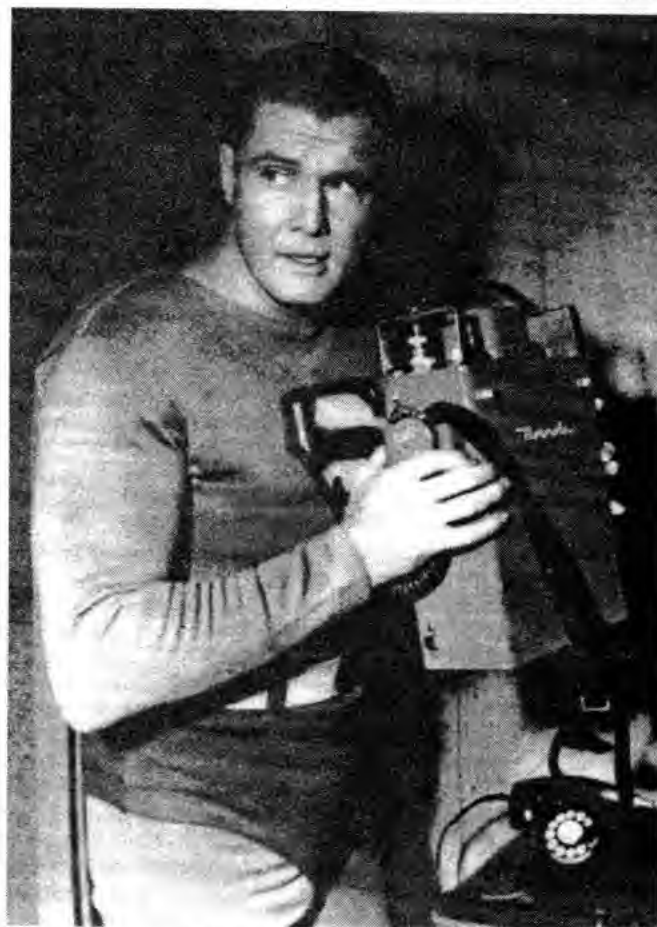
"After *Action* #1, I began filling in the gaps in my comic book collection. I always focused on one medium of the genre at a time. So in the '60s, I concentrated on my comic book collection. I kept up with the new comics in those days as well. You couldn't go wrong — they cost 10-12 cents apiece — those were the things you picked up at Thrifty's.

I've always been a completist. But anything pertaining to George Reeves was always first on my want list. His portrayal of Superman inspired me to collect on the entire genre of Reeves' Superman-related material. It was George and George alone who sold me on Superman.

"In 1971, after my family had relocated in Huntington Park, California, I used to ride my 10-speed bicycle all the way from Huntington Park to Hollywood, to the famed Western Costume Company. On my subsequent visits, I saw pieces of Reeves' costume, and they were in the 'untouchable' category at Western Costume. A year passed between my next three or four visits to Western Costume to check out what was still in stock. By that time, George's costumes housed at Western had disappeared. On those visits, I also saw a lot of costumes from things like *Flash Gordon*, *Captain Marvel*, and both *Batman* serials.

"In the meantime, I had contacted Whitney Ellsworth. I had many conversations with Whitney about the show, and he was very flattered that anyone was as interested in *The Adventures Of Superman* as I was. Consequently, he made a lot of different George Reeves artifacts available to me. I got my first Superman costume from Whitney.

"I've handled many Superman costumes over the years — ones with his foam rubber muscles, ones without. George had to carry all these rubber appliances under those wool suits, 15 to 20 pounds of foam rubber. No wonder it was reported George broke out in rashes! Anyone would have. Not to mention how many re-takes would have to be done when the artificial rubber muscles didn't look right. The foam rubber extended from George's shoulder down to his forearm. His biceps and triceps were encased in foam rubber. Under the kind of lighting they used (especially the color years), and the natural heat of a summer-to-fall shooting schedule, Reeves could not avoid foam rubber-caused rashes. The weight of the entire suit alone restricts move-



"The Girl Who Hired Superman," 1955.





"Panic In The Sky," second season.

ment, and George would get up on ladders, roll into windows on a chin-up bar ring, jump out of windows onto mattresses, and bounce off of springboards, with all this rubber and the heat of the lights and the natural elements, like dust and dirt. It's amazing they got as much good stuff on film as they did. I'd love to see out-takes, but they are few and far between.

"Superman's boots for the black and white years were literally Kirk Alyn's boots, that were stored at Western Costume, surgically altered for George. They took the laces out of the sides, and laid a piece of suede in to conceal the join, and put a zipper in the back for easy access. Who knows whether they bothered to do a custom boot fit for George for the second season, after he got Kirk Alyn's hand-me-downs. The other thing they did to both the black and white and color boots (the color boots were magnificent, and probably took a good amount of the costume budget) is put small multi-inch lifts in the heels, giving Reeves the illusion of standing taller," states Hambrick. "He wasn't as tall as the Costume Department would have you believe."

"I first became aware of *Superman* in 1966. It was on the ABC affiliate in New Orleans, where I grew up. They were running it at the same time they debuted the Adam West *Batman* series. ABC was airing *Superman* in reruns," recalls John Norris, a contributing writer to *Cult Movies Magazine*, and long-time *Superman* fan. "They only ran the color episodes, and seeing that along with *Batman* on the same network couldn't be beat. The thing that made *Superman* for me was George. He looked just like Superman, he acted just like Superman. The difference between the *Batman* and *Superman* shows was that *Batman* was high camp. I took *Superman* seriously. *Superman* was more believable than the funny stuff they did on *Batman*, which was basically a live cartoon. Not that I didn't take *Batman* seriously, as a small kid. But as an adult, the differences are glaringly apparent. With *Batman*, as kids, we were so young

the jokes went right over our heads. George Reeves as *Superman* was more serious and believable at eight years old.

"The supporting cast couldn't have been better. They were excellent, because each defined their comic book counterparts. Noel Neill as Lois Lane in those color shows was a sight to behold. She didn't have the hard edge that Phyllis Coates had, but she had a great warmth and curiosity, and was constantly on the quest to prove that Clark Kent and *Superman* were one and the same. The funny thing is, they did not rerun the black and white episodes. It seems the station had a policy to show only color then, as the mass availability of color TV had only taken place two years before.

"We knew George was dead when we first saw this show. My friends and I had heard what is now regarded as the bizarre rumor that George was so tangled up in the role of *Superman* that one evening at his house, he believed he should take a quick patrol of Los Angeles, and jumped out the window, plunging to his death. It always put kind of a weird cloud over the show. We did find out later he died from a gunshot wound. It didn't seem to matter that George was dead. It still drew me and all my friends in whenever it was on TV.

"Later, I saw *Gone With The Wind* with my parents. My mother had been a friend of Fred Crane, George's Tarleton Twin brother. It never dawned on me that Reeves was the same person I was seeing on TV as *Superman*.

"My favorite season is the second season. 'Panic In The Sky' for me is everything a *Superman* episode should be. It's outstanding. It has every element that I loved in the comics. It was played straight — there were no goofy villains, no corny plots. It was straight-up '50s sci-fi. Noel Neill, Jack Larson, and John Hamilton are superb as Clark Kent's co-workers, as he fights against his Kryptonite induced amnesia from the asteroid that is about to destroy planet Earth.

"Another great show is 'Shot In The Dark,' where *Superman* is photographed changing into his alter ego in an alley. 'Defeat Of *Superman*' was the first episode to deal with Kryptonite. 'Superman In Exile' — a warning for the atomic future. The bottom line was George Reeves was *Superman* to my generation."

Bob Colman, proprietor of Hollywood Poster Exchange, remembered his first encounter with the Man of Steel. "I was in the seventh grade. Before the show came out, there was intense publicity, aimed at kids my age and much younger. By this time, I had already seen hundreds of movies, because my family were regular movie-goers, especially in the '50s and '60s. I had seen the Kirk Alyn serials when they were first released, when I was about seven or eight years old. The first one was released in sepia tone, while the second one wasn't. The main difference between the *Superman* serials and the TV show is in the TV show, you got to see George fly. We always felt a little bit gypped that Kirk Alyn was a believable *Superman* on the ground, but the minute he flew, or there was any outer space business, it turned into a cheap Katzman cartoon.

"So my school friends and I were primed and ready, because they did this elaborate campaign to plug the TV show. That first Monday night was magic. 'Superman On Earth' — the origin of *Superman*, couldn't have been better. When we saw George fly, the believability of *Superman* was established. George fit the character physically and mentally. The first show was out of the ABC affiliate, KECA, which was the Los Angeles outlet. KECA had a big dedication ceremony for a big new transfer station, which was to up the broadcast wattage to homes all over the Southland. I remember this distinctly, some time in the mid-'50s. It was a live broadcast, and George was there in full costume as *Superman*, for the dedication ceremonies. Of course, as *Superman*, he turned on the transformer to boost the

station's wattage.

"I didn't see *Superman And The Mole Men* first run. To my recollection, *Superman And The Mole Men* did not play in first release in Los Angeles theaters. I saw it a few years after it was released, on a kiddie matinee. I was damn lucky to see it, seeing as it has not been around in its original form until they re-released it on video tape."

Dr. Don Rhoden is an Omaha anesthesiologist. In February of 1988, he published *The Adventures Continue* fanzine. For the last seven years, the fanzine has been a pipeline for Superman fans around the world to keep up on the First Citizen of Krypton. After two issues, Dr. Rhoden relinquished the editing and publishing.

"I have been a Superman fan since the age of three or four, when I first saw *The Adventures Of Superman* on KMTV (in Omaha, Nebraska) in 1960 or 1961," reminisces Dr. Rhoden. "It was on in the late afternoon, after *Popeye*, which was one of my favorite shows. When it first came on, my mother tried to discourage me from watching it. 'Oh, you don't want to watch that. It's too silly.' I remember a few moments though, from 'The Wedding Of Superman,' but didn't get to watch the whole thing.

"Eventually, I did get to watch the show. The first episode I saw was 'The Golden Vulture.' After that, I was hooked, and my life was changed. I went berserk.

"With the reluctant help of my folks, I made my own Superman insignia out of felt, which was placed on various shirts and my cape. My parents bought me several costumes. My suits were far from invulnerable, each quickly needing knee patches due to my Super-clumsiness.

"I also discovered Superman comics. Among the first Superman comics I bought were *Superman* #146 (the ultimate origin story), *Adventure Comics* #286 (with the tales of the Bizarro World), *Lois Lane* #26, *Superboy* #91, *World's Finest* #119 (in this one I discovered Batman), *Jimmy Olsen* #55, and *Action* #281.

"Around 1963 or so, the television series was canceled and I didn't see it again until 1975, when it was broadcast on WOWT. This time, however, only the color episodes were shown. I watched them, but the magic was missing.

"The 1951 season is far and away my favorite. The 1951 episodes had this incredible atmosphere to them. They were violent, explosive, moody, bizarre, and macabre all at once.

"My favorite all time episode is 'The Evil Three.' Cecil Elliot's laughter still sends chills up and down my spine. In no particular order, the next nine are: 'Night Of Terror' — what a bitchin' ending; 'The Mind Machine' — keeps you on the edge of your chair; 'The Secret Of Superman' — Reeves fools the audience when he drinks the powerful amyltal compound; 'Mystery In Wax' — the suicide theme here ironically foreshadows Reeves' own fate eight years later; 'The Human Bomb' — 'Now it's my turn to blow up!' snaps Lois; 'Czar Of The Underworld' — with hard-edged dialogue like: 'So I can show you how movies are made.'; 'Crime Wave' — 'Now you can print that statement Mr. Canby wanted you to print. There is no number one crime boss in Metropolis — any more!' barks a pissed-off Superman; 'Panic



George with his beloved Sam the schnauzer on the set.

In The Sky' — This episode really conveyed a doomsday atmosphere (especially to a four-year-old); 'A Ghost For Scotland Yard' — guaranteed to give a kid nightmares.

"After Episode #26, 'The Unknown People Part II,' it was mostly downhill, with few exceptions (mostly from the 1953 episodes). I loved every second of *Superman And The Mole Men*. Although the music was not nearly as good as the television music, I still enjoyed it. It reminded me of the old '50s science fiction movie music heard on the late shows of the last 20 years. The only bad thing about the film was that it was too short. I was hoping for all sorts of stuff, like an extended fight scene where Superman takes the guns from the vigilante mob.

"Viewing the first season now, gives me the sensation of looking through a time machine at a world of yesterday that needed a violent Superman to keep it safe.

"Superman was always great for bloopers. You can see the springboard at the bottom of the screen, after Reeves leaves the Colonel in 'The Evil Three.' When wrestling promoter Murray and his mobsters leave their car, it rolls backwards because the driver forgot to set the parking brake in 'No Holds Barred.' 'Drums Of Death' — Superman flies out of his hotel room in Haiti which looks exactly like the storeroom in the Daily Planet. George bangs the head of Dinelli (actually a dummy) on a brick wall when he lands back at the studio in 'Czar Of The Underworld.' The newspaper says





Dr. Hurley was the fourth suicide when he was only the third in 'Mystery In Wax.'

"Some of the great moments from the show are Superman jumping out of the storeroom window in the 1951 episodes. The hair-raising fist fight, and last second rescue of Lois and Jimmy in 'Night Of Terror.'

"Superman questioning the Colonel, in 'The Evil Three,' immediately before getting smashed across the chest with the Colonel's sabre. 'The Evil Three,' with the crazed fight scene between Macey and the Colonel. Superman crashing through the window and beating up Dinelli and his henchmen in 'Czar Of The Underworld.'

"Superman carrying a wounded mole man (while three others follow) down the dilapidated black-and-white street of Silsby, his cape billowing in the wind, in 'Unknown People Part II.' An amnesiac Clark Kent standing with his partially opened shirt, revealing his costume, talking to Jimmy in 'Panic In The Sky.' The eerily illuminated figure of Superman standing dejected on a mountain top in 'Superman In Exile.' Those are the things that have made me a lifelong fan."

In 1989 Pennsylvania educator Jim Nolt took over the editing and publishing of *The Adventures Continue*. Nolt recalls his first introduction to the Man of Steel. "I have been a devotee of *The Adventures Of Superman* series since 1953, when I watched my first thrill-packed episode. Something about George Reeves' characterization moved me, made me care about the show.

"I clearly remember the day I read his obituary in the newspaper. I cut the article from the paper and have carried it with me for these 36 years. On *Donahue*, Jack Larson told of being permanently saddened when he learned of his friend's death. I feel much the same way. I know my life was changed because he lived; I also know that it was changed because he died.

"Through the years I have tried to contact several of the cast and crew. Starting in 1979, I was successful in finding Whitney Ellsworth, Robert Shayne, Herb Vigran, Sterling Holloway, Dabbs Greer and Natividad Vacio. In July 1979, Gail (my wife), Lisa (our daughter) and I travelled to California to have lunch with Whit and his wife, Jane. Later that afternoon we visited with Bob Shayne. Sadly, just one month after our visit, Whit passed away in his sleep. Bob

and I stayed in close contact, exchanging letters or phone calls every two or three months.

"The first *Superman* episode I recall seeing was 'The Haunted Lighthouse.' In 1953, my nephew and I made costumes for ourselves and made believe we flew through the skies of Pennsylvania. We lived on a small farm, so there was plenty of wide open space for our activities. Over the years, I sent away for several of the premiums which Kellogg's offered. Among my favorites was the Superman T-shirt, which I completely wore out (and even then, I cut out the 'S' and sewed it onto another t-shirt).

"In 1965 I bought an audio tape recorder so that I could listen to the programs over and over again.

"I consider the second season to be my favorite. I know many people prefer the first, but I enjoy the human interest scripts: 'Five Minutes To Doom,' 'Superman In Exile,' 'The Defeat Of Superman,' 'Panic In The Sky,' and of course, 'Around The World.' There were many others, but all share one common trait — each gave George Reeves the opportunity to project emotion, to show that he cared. My favorite 10 episodes? At the top of the list would have to be 'Panic In The Sky' and 'Around The World.' After that, in no particular order, are 'The Lucky Cat,' 'The Man In The Lead Mask,' 'Shot In The Dark,' 'Defeat Of Superman,' 'A Ghost For Scotland Yard,' 'The Evil Three,' 'The Case Of The Talkative Dummy,' and 'Ghost Wolf.'

"I suppose the 1956 season rates as the worst with me. The plots were thin and the acting sub-par. Gregory Moffet in 'The Stolen Elephant' was not good. I just can't imagine any boy getting so excited over a game of marbles or not knowing what an automobile registration looks like. Did he really believe it was an elephant registration number (J24Y97)? Were we supposed to believe it?

"'Close Shave' left much to be desired as well. Ditto for 'The Man Who Made Dreams Come True.' George's personality came through those weak shows. He made the series work."

The prospect of Superman dropping out of sight, at least on Planet Earth, is highly unlikely. That indelible image was defined by George Reeves. While the Max Fleischer cartoons, the Columbia serials, and the radio shows followed the comic strip, George Reeves clearly brought Superman into the hearts and minds of millions. ■

# Superboy & Superpup

## Episode Guide To The Lost Videos

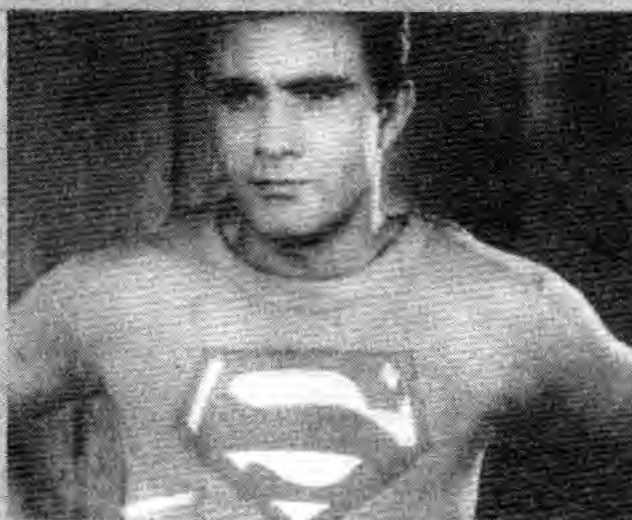
Written By Chuck Harter

Superman producer Whitney Ellsworth created these two spin-off TV shows, Superpup (1958) and Superboy (1961). Complete pilot shows for each were filmed, but in both cases sponsors backed out, and the shows were never distributed. Why???

Find out in this amazing, fact-filled book. This 116-page collectors edition contains:

- Over 150 never-before-seen photos
- Production information
- A complete look at the 12 unfiled Superboy episodes
- Exclusive interviews with cast & crew. You'll see John Rockwell, Billy Curtis, George Reeves and many more!!!

These shows are unique parts of the history of the celluloid Superman.



*Yes! I want this super new book now!  
Rush my copy of Superboy & Superpup.  
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